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JULY

# The Rio Kid Western

A THRIL
PUBLICATION

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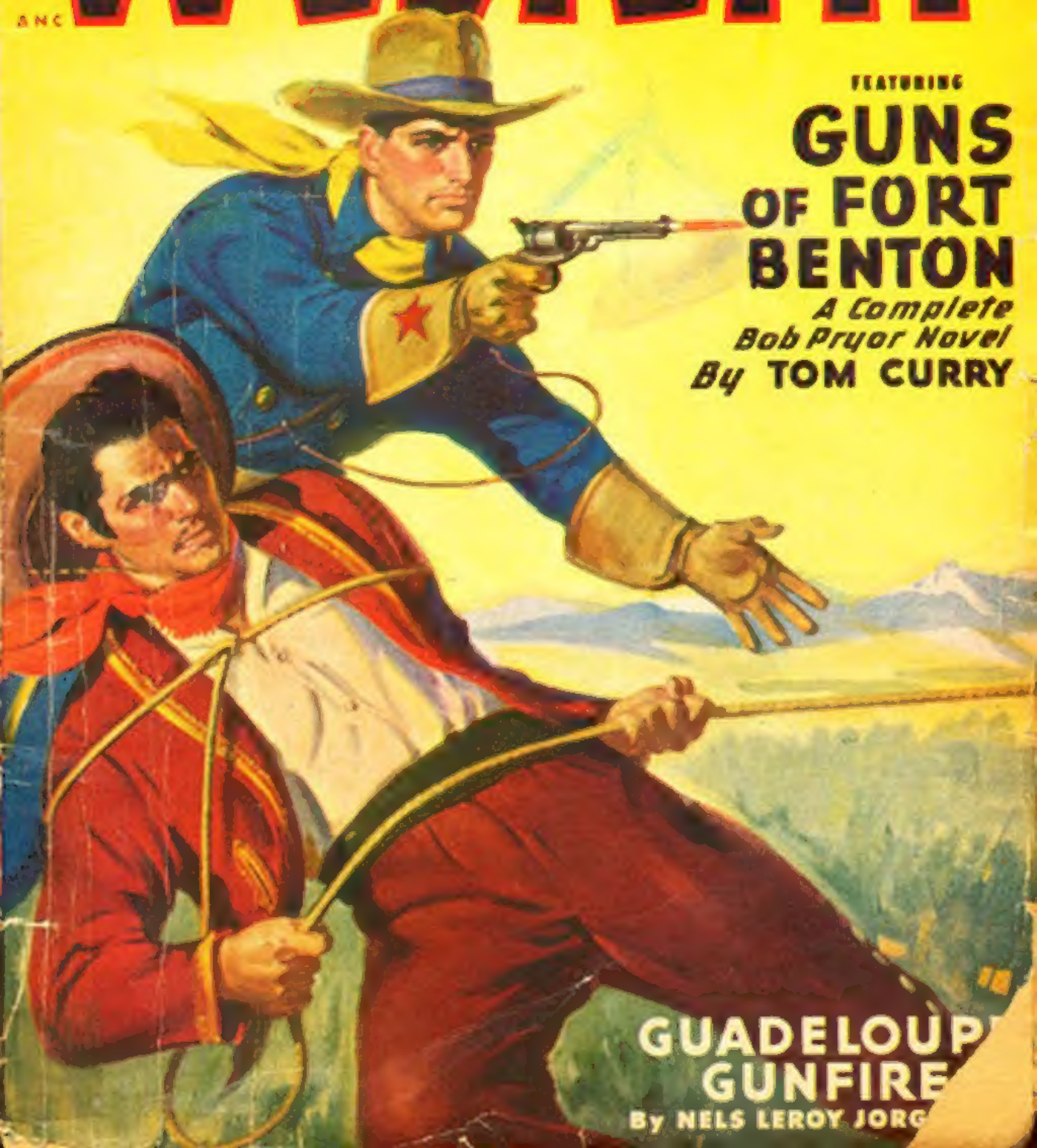

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# The Rio Kid Western

Vol. XX, No. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION JULY, 1950


## COMPLETE NOVEL

# Guns of Fort Benton

### By TOM CURRY

It's war with bullwhip, carbine and Colt as the Rio Kid and his fighting pards find themselves pitted against the ruthless raiders and crooked land-grabbing packs that hold Montana in terror! 11

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A true story of the inventive genius of John Browning, famous gunsmith



**Also See Portraits and Biographies of General Eugene Asa Carr, "The War Eagle," and William Frederick Cody, "Buffalo Bill," on Pages 25 and 29**



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# THE Bunkhouse

## A Department for Readers conducted by FOGHORN CLANCY

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GREETINGS, waddies, gather with us at the old bunk house and we will talk over old times in this great country of ours. Gabbing is usually our regular pastime after our evening meal, which the city folk call dinner, but which the cowboy still maintains is supper. We sit around in the old bunk house and discuss things that happened years ago and sometimes the arguments grow warm, because stories of the long ago are apt to be told differently by different people, and each one usually claims that his is the correct version.

Anyway, the other night, after we had all gathered at the bunk house, Sundown Slim, as usual, was reading the newspaper that the boss had given him at the ranch house. Slim is always right there to get that paper just as soon as the boss has finished reading it, and so he was reading to himself when all at once he exclaimed, "Well, what do you know?" and then he began to read aloud.

### A Reformed Badman

The story was from Tulsa, Oklahoma, was dated January 7th and headed, "Reformed Badman Texas Jack Dies with Boots Off!"

The story continued, "Reformed outlaw Texas Jack, who rode with the Daltons, Bill Doolin and Henry Starr, died Saturday with his boots off. Jack—whose real name was Nathaniel Reed passed on peacefully in his bed at his home, an old man of 87. No immediate relatives survive. The crusty old-timer still bore 14 bullet wounds, scarred mementos of his life as a desperado in Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. He boasted of four train robberies, seven bank thefts, three stage holdups and two gold bullion snatches.

"His career of crime came to an abrupt end before Judge Isaac C. Parker, at Fort Smith, the famous hanging judge of Arkansas, who released Jack when he turned state's evidence. It resulted in conviction for his confederates. The penitent badman then became an evangelist. He toured the country with a wagon and team of horses, preaching the moral of respectable living. Reed later appeared in wild west shows billed as 'Texas Jack, Train Robber.' He was born in Arkansas in 1862 and will be returned to his native state for burial, friends said."

### The Error of His Ways

This news item was of interest not only to Sundown Slim, but also of interest to me for I had known Texas Jack personally, not at the time he was a train robber, but after he had turned evangelist and was trying to show the youth of the country the error of riding outside the law.

It was in 1903 at a number of little picnics or old settlers' reunions in the Indian Territory that I got acquainted with the former outlaw. He had a light wagon and team of horses, a camp outfit and some crudely-painted charts or scenes which were supposed to depict some of the train [rob]beries he had engaged in, and he would explain how they were handled.

He was uneducated, and in explaining a holdup when he would be telling of the position he was left in as a guard, his favorite expression was "I stood pillar to post." Though his grammar was bad, his lang[uage]

was plain, and he got the idea across that crime does not pay.

### The Corn-Stealer

It was at a reunion grounds on a bank of the Caney River that Jack brought home to one fellow that honesty is the best policy. This fellow, who followed the picnics and reunions with a concession, also had a team of horses and a wagon. He never bothered about buying any feed for his horses, but would go into a cornfield and gather feed whenever his team needed it.

Jack remonstrated with the fellow about his taking feed from the fields, telling him that in reality it was just as much a sin to steal that feed as it was to rob a train or a bank, but the fellow paid no attention.

One night Jack framed a fellow to go with the concession man into the corn field and when they had gathered a sack of corn, Jack, who had sneaked up close, fired his gun in the air. The fellow fell as if he were shot. The concession man dropped the sack of corn and ran for his life. He came near running right into the river, but he never stopped, nor did he try to find out whether his helper was badly wounded or killed. He ran to his camp, hitched up his team, and drove out into the night for parts unknown. Texas Jack just smiled and said, "I'll bet his corn-stealing days are over!"

He was not bitter against the law. Having ridden with Bill Doolin and his gang, and knowing how desperate Doolin was, Jack's opinion was that the bravest lawman that ever lived was Billy Tilghman, the man who once captured the notorious Oklahoma and Indian Territory outlaw. Jack couldn't have been far from right in his opinion of that great lawman known to all the southwest affectionately as "Uncle" Billy Tilghman, for no man, lawman or outlaw, could have shown more nerve, or remained cooler in the face of death, than did Uncle Billy once when he walked into a trap set by this same Bill Doolin.

### Winter Trail

The Doolin gang were terrorizing Oklahoma, as the James-Younger gang had done Missouri years before, and because the law had so many friends among the ranchers, who would shelter and hide him, Tilgh-

[Turn page]

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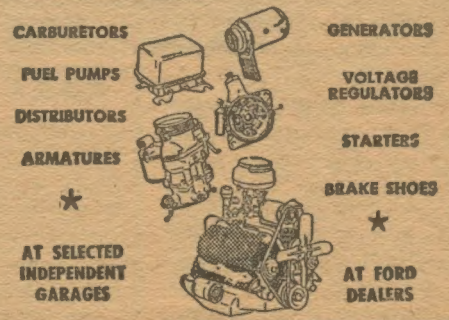


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man thought that perhaps the best way to effect his capture was first to arrest some of the ranchers who were known to harbour bandits and were suspected of cattle stealing.

Taking a deputy by the name of Neal Brown with him, Tilghman left Guthrie with two saddle horses tied behind a covered wagon. They had food and a camping outfit. It was a bitter cold day in January, 1895, when the officers reached the ranch at Rock Fort, where the principal suspects lived. Snow blanketed the ground. The sky was gray, promising more snow.

Smoke rose from the chimney of the cabin of the ranch they approached. The smoke curling up from the chimney seemed to indicate that the cabin was occupied, but there were no horses or men to be seen outside. Tilghman figured that if there were men inside the cabin, they were not figuring upon a visit from the law and their horses were in all probability in the barn.

## Cabin Snare

Tilghman's strategy was always bold and simple.

Leaving his rifle in the wagon, he walked through the snow to the house, knocked on the door, and when no answer came pushed it open and went inside.

A good fire was burning in the fireplace, in front of which sat the man that Tilghman wanted to capture as the first rancher suspect, and it was plain that this man did not intend to be taken, as he sat with a rifle across his knees.

The rancher looked up at the officer without speaking, his attitude seeming to say, "It's your first move, then I will finish it for you." It was no time to hesitate, and Tilghman moved forward to the fire and as he did he observed that on each side of the room there was a tier of bunks hung with curtains so that he could not tell whether the beds were occupied or not. His hands were half frozen from the cold. He knew that he was at a distinct disadvantage if it became a matter of a fast draw and accurate shooting. His hands were too cold for fast gun action.

He walked right up to the fire, held his hands toward the blaze for a moment, then turned to face the room with his hands behind him, still feeling the warming effect of the fire.

The first glance after turning his back to the fire Tilghman knew that he was righ

the middle of a trap. The barrel of a rifle projected an inch or more from the edge of the curtain of each bunk. Eight desperate men, dead shots, had him covered and at any moment might blaze away at him. If they thought that he had a posse with him, they would not hesitate for an instant.

### Tilghman's Iron Nerve

It was a spot where most men woud have experienced panic, but Tilghman's iron nerve stood the test. Not by the twitch of an eyelid or the slightest quaver of the voice did he betray the fact that he knew he was in deadly peril. He talked quietly, casually, about the happenings in this cow country, touched on the gossip of the day, and inquired about the best road to reach a destination he invented on the spur of the moment. He even joked about arranging a fight between his dog and one of Doolin's. Then without haste, as though reluctant to leave the good fire, he said he reckoned he must be going.

At an even pace he moved to the door, nodded a seemingly careless, "So long" and stepped outside.

To Neal Brown, after he had reached the wagon, he gave quiet orders: "Drive on, not too fast, and don't look round."

In that room were Bill Doolin, Little Dick, Tulsa Jack, Charley Pierce, and others. No man ever had a closer shave. Only a superb display of cool nerve saved Tilghman and his deputy. As it was, he had no sooner cleared the door than one of the bandits, known as Red Buck, jumped from his bunk and swore to kill him at once. Bill Doolin saved the marshal's life. He closed with Red Buck, struggling with the furious man, while exclaiming, "Bill Tilghman is too good a man to shoot in the back!"

### The Owlhoot's Hard to Quit

Doolin married a preacher's daughter, Edith Ellsworth. They loved each other devotedly and more than once Doolin made up his mind to reform, but it is hard for one who has followed the owlhoot trails to quit, especially if he has been lucky enough not to be cornered in by the law, and in Doolin's case was the same as in many others. Having been the leader of a gang of outlaws, other

*(Continued on page 92)*


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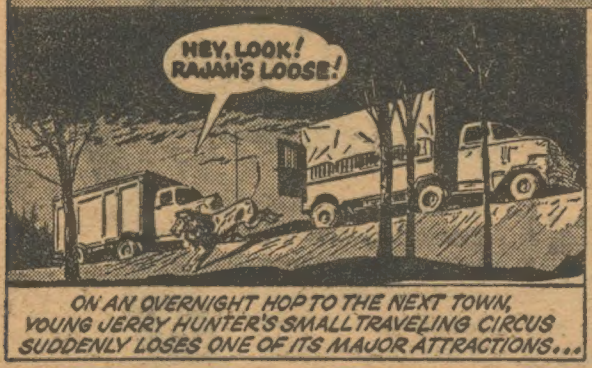


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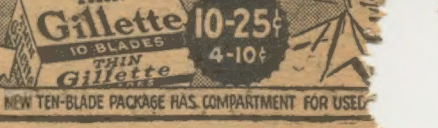


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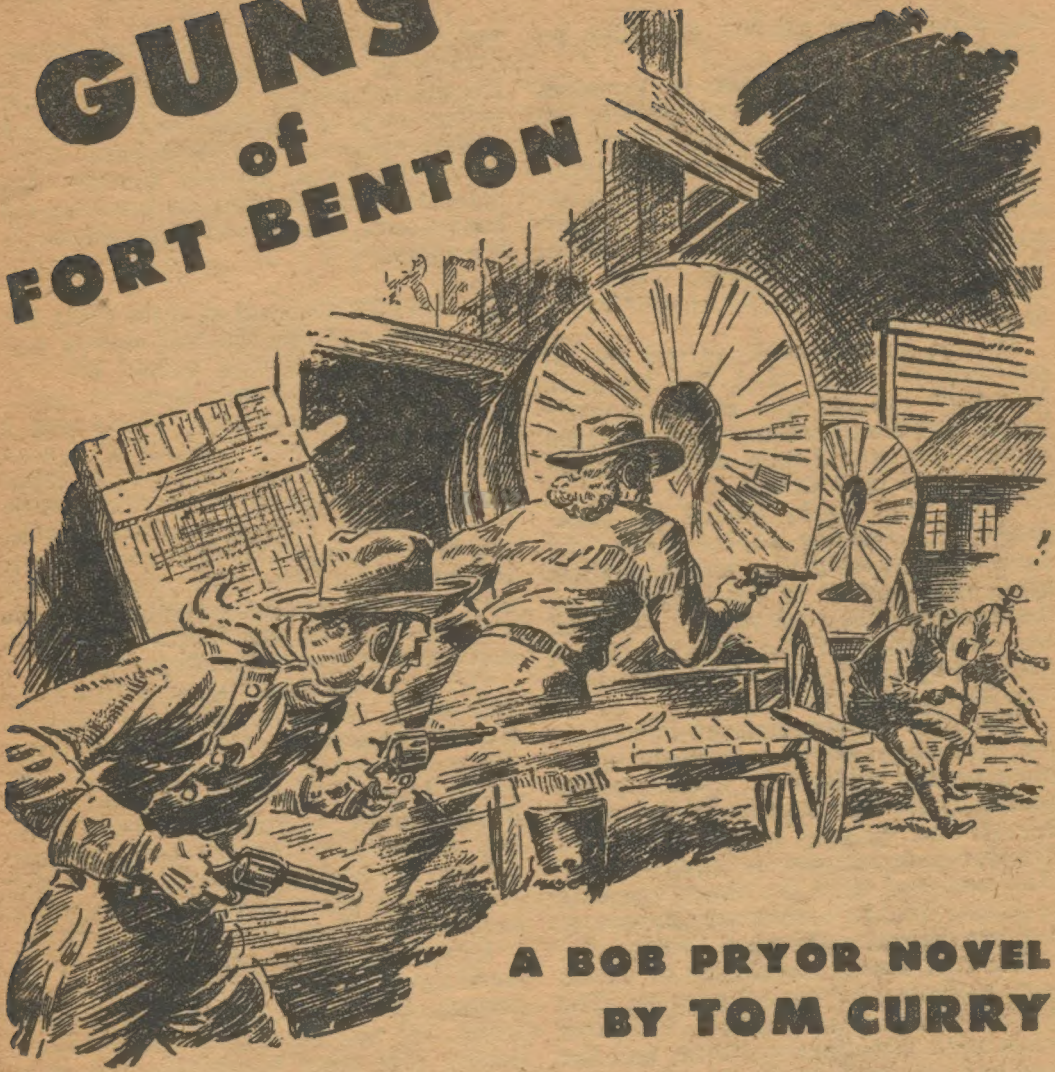
# GUNS of FORT BENTON



## A BOB PRYOR NOVEL BY TOM CURRY

*It's war with bullwhip, carbine and Colt as the Rio Kid and his pards are pitted against the land-grabbing pack terrorizing Montana!*

### CHAPTER I

*Frontier Fighters*

THE RAIN had stopped by sundown and the Rio Kid, with his comrade, pushed on toward Fort Benton, head of navigation on the Missouri River. The two riders could see the settlement's lurid glow in the misty air.

They wasted no time, maintaining a fast clip despite the gumbo into which the road was chronically churned by the heavy bull wagons plying between Benton and the mountain mining camps to the southwest.

They were alert, their loaded weapons ready for instant use, should there be any sudden emergency. Indians—the sullen Blackfeet, the furious Sioux and Cheyennes—moved in these wilds, mak-

# Flame Sears the Banks of the Missouri When

ing a final stand against the white invaders.

Even more dangerous to travelers were the road agents and rustlers infesting the country, robbing stages and wagons of bullion shipments, ambushing small parties for their horses and what the victims might carry in pockets and saddlebags. Some worked alone, others in highly organized bands. There was no law save what might be applied by local vigilantes.

It was unanimously agreed by all qualified to judge that the Montana brand of outlaw was extraordinarily tough. Cruel and callous, when cornered such killers would fight with the feral savagery of mad wolves.

Lewis and Clark, guided by Sacajawea, the friendly Indian maid, had come this way when they had made their great explorations at the beginning of the century. The road roughly followed the north bank of the Missouri River, confined by clay banks which sometimes rose to towering heights.

Reaching the outskirts of Fort Benton, the howl of the town seemed deafening after the wilderness. Pianos, transported by steamer up the muddy, winding stream, banged away. Shouts of drunken men and women, squealing fiddles, now and then the sharp cracking of pistols fired by exuberant cowboys or hunters, helped make up a sinister din.

The fort was a blockhouse of adobe, with bastions at diagonal corners. The Rio Kid had been here before. The outer walls were unbelievably thick, and the post had been built by the American Fur Company, which later leased it to the Government. A handful of infantry now occupied the quarters.

The river curved away from the boisterous settlement. Several rear-wheelers, upper decks level with the top of the bank, were warped to the crude docks. Shallow-draft, capable of churning through the treacherous silt banks which could form overnight in the channels, the boats brought in supplies for the Western gold camps—food, liquor and guns, mining machinery and blasting powder—returning with cargoes of ore, hides and other raw materials.

Tents of canvas and buffalo hides, log and adobe shacks, wickiups, larger structures with false fronts, stood in disorderly array. The streets were inches deep in gluelike mud, and lined with wagons and saddle-horses. Cowboys, freighters, buffalo hunters, Indians and steamboat crews crowded the honkytonks, armed and quarrelsome in their cups.

LANTERNS hung on poles along the way and the Rio Kid slowed and relaxed in the lighted town. He was bronzed and handsome, features clean-cut, his eyes a deep blue. There was a sureness about him, the air of a man who knows how to lead, which came from long experience in handling perilous situations. During the Civil War he had been Captain Robert Pryor and had fought under Generals Custer and Sheridan. He was still a soldier at heart, although now he was famed as a scout and fighting man of the Frontier.

Broad of shoulder, tapering to a narrow waist, his strong form was clad in blue breeches with a faded yellow stripe down the seams, tucked into spurred Army boots. He wore a blue shirt, an Army Stetson, and cartridge belts holding ammunition for the two Colt revolvers in his side holsters. Wise to the ways of the wilds, he had also two more hand guns concealed under his armpits.

Urged on by a restlessness which could never be satisfied by humdrum existence, the Rio Kid rode the danger trails. He was noted as a marksman, a deadly shot from horseback, and as a brave and decent man.

Under him was Saber, a dun with a black stripe down his spine, "the breed that never dies." Trained as a war horse, the fiery Saber loved the smoke of battle.

"I could do with a drink and a hot meal, Celestino," said the Rio Kid to his trail *compadre*.

Celestino Mireles was a young Mexican who followed Pryor through thick and thin, having thrown in his lot with the Rio Kid. He wore a steeple som brero and a dark, velvet suit. His fe tures had the proud hidalgo cast, wit hawk nose, deep-set black eyes and high cheek bones. Pistols and a long knif

were thrust into the wide red sash at his slender waist.

"*Si*, General. I, too, am hungry."

After the War, when Bob Pryor had returned to Texas, he had snatched Celestino from death on the Rio Grande, and to Mireles the Rio Kid would always be his "general."

Saber snorted and rippled his hide. The Rio Kid grew uneasy also, but could not fathom it. There should be no danger here, yet he sensed peril. Then he caught the metallic noise of cocking guns. "Pull up!" a hard voice sang out.

They were but a block from the heart of Fort Benton. The muzzles of carbines and sawed-off shotguns covered them from a corner where loomed a squat, darkened adobe storehouse. The Rio Kid and the Mexican were framed against the street lantern. It was no time to start fighting.

"What's wrong, boys?" called the Rio Kid. He would draw and whirl if need be, but this might be a citizens' posse checking up.

"Vigilantes," replied the still-invisible man gruffly.

Several showed themselves now, but were very careful about it, holding cocked weapons on the pair. A man in dirty brown pants and a stained shirt, a tobacco cud bulging out one leathery cheek, was the speaker. His battered felt hat was shoved back, exposing bleached, straw-colored hair. His brows and beard stubble were so light they scarcely were visible against his hide. Slight of build, his appearance was formidable just the same.

CAPTAIN BOB PRYOR

A Colt pistol hung at one side of his belt, a muleskinner's blacksnake whip, lash coiled, from its swivel at the other. He gripped a double-barreled, sawed-off shotgun.

The shot from such a weapon would scatter and riddle a close target.

Pryor did not like his face, with its thin, sharp nose and close-set eyes red-rimmed from too much whiskey. The man could not open his traplike mouth without fouling the air with profanity.

The Rio Kid knew a vicious character when he saw one, and he was prepared to defend himself.

"Turn that bull's-eye on the cusses, Murph," ordered the shotgunner.

One of his crew opened the slide and a yellow beam swept the Mexican, focused on the Rio Kid.

"Where you think you're goin'?" demanded their captor.

On anything like even terms Pryor would have told him to mind his business, but now he answered in a level voice, "To the hotel to eat and sleep, mister. We're from Helena, and aim to move downriver in the morning."

"That is, if you *can* move," corrected the fellow, with evil humor.

"Hey, Mulehide, here comes the boss," announced another tough.

BOTH the Rio Kid and Mireles had small sacks of gold dust hidden under their clothing. They had done some prospecting in the mountains, but after a fling had decided the game was not worth the strain.

Pryor was well aware that outlaw bands kept spies in the mining camps and along the trails, watching for outgoing miners who would be homeward-bound with their hard-earned gold. Many had been killed and robbed.

The Rio Kid could draw with the speed of lightning and he was sure he could take "Mulehide," as the shotgunner was nicknamed, along with him, and no doubt a couple more. Celestino would account for one or two, but the survivors, back in the shadows, could cut the riders down.

A tall figure rushed up, trailed by more armed Missouri River roughs.

"What holds, Latham?" demanded the chief sharply.

"Hey, Baldy, take a peek at these catfish!" Mulehide Latham's voice was subservient as he addressed his boss.

"That ain't Buffalo Bill," growled "Baldy" in disgust. "I told you what Cody looks like!"

"I savvy," replied Mulehide, injured. "But he could be workin' for that sidewinder."

Inwardly, the Rio Kid jumped. "Buffalo Bill" Cody was an old friend and Pryor had scouted with the famous plainsman. These killers were hunting for Cody, and on this account a contingent had stopped the Rio Kid as he entered Fort Benton. He stared curiously at the tall, rangy man.

Baldy had a black Stetson jammed down on his elongated, bony skull. No sign of hair could be seen below the sweatband. His nose was large and hooked, his mouth very wide, and as he drew back his lips in a humorless grin the lanternlight gleamed on big, yellowed buck teeth.

His eyes were green as a cat's, his cheeks coarsened by wind and sun. Though it was a warm night he had on a frock coat, his gray pants tucked into new black boots. A white stock was wrapped around his turkeylike neck. His gun-belt rode high, a walnut-stocked sixshooter holstered on the left. If right-handed, he would draw across his body.

"Look here, mister," said the Rio Kid. "We been riding all day and we're plumb worn out. If anything's wrong, we ain't it."

"Do you savvy Buffalo Bill Cody?" was the answer.

"No, never bumped into him," lied Pryor.

"There's been a lot of trouble in these parts," explained Baldy. "Killings, holdups galore. We decent citizens aim to stop it. They attacked a wagon train from the mountains this morning and killed two bullwhackers, that's why we're checkin' up."

The Rio Kid had just come through and had seen no sign of such an occurrence, but he held his tongue. He did not believe that Baldy and Mulehide were honest men seeking to enforce the laws.

Fort Benton was jammed. The gathering at the corner drew the curious, who stopped to watch while others hustled toward the scene. Baldy did not fancy this public attention.

"Shut off that bull's-eye," he commanded. "All right, gents, go on. But keep in the middle of the road and mind your business. This is a tough town."

He backed off then, fading into the shadows with his men.

The Rio Kid and Celestino moved to the main street. Lighted saloons and gambling parlors shouldered one another and the mud-churned street slanted down to the docks, where st[illegible] the rearwheelers. All sorts of frei[illegible] had been unloaded and dumped at [illegible] end of the line.

Through here passed thousands tenderfeet and experienced miners

The bandits took cover by setting themselves along the creek bank (CHAP. X)

well, all bent on reaching the gold fields and winning a quick fortune. Prices were skyhigh. A few buildings were of two stories, while others had false fronts of fancy design.

As Pryor and Mireles dismounted and dropped rein, they could hear the whine of roulette wheels in the saloons.

Ducking under the railing, they entered the Royal Flush, which seemed to be the largest of the honkytonks. A seething mass of humanity occupied the place. The Rio Kid's expert eyes could classify most individuals.

Here were gamblers in black coats and stiff hats. Miners and buffalo-hunters in buckskin could be identified by their garb and manner. Deckhands and officers from the river boats mingled in the noisy bar.

The bar had been brought upriver by steamer. It was of fine mahogany and stretched all the way down the right side of the room. Huge mirrors hung behind it.

In the rear was a lunch counter, and across the dance floor was the gambling section where a man could lose his hard-earned money at roulette, chuck-a-luck, blackjack, poker or whatever game he fancied. Tobacco smoke hung thick around brass lamps suspended from the rafters.

## CHAPTER II

### *Smuggled Guns*

ELBOW to elbow, serious imbibers held the line, several ranks deep. By nudging and pushing, the Rio Kid and his partner finally managed to buy a drink. Backing out, they visited the free-lunch table. As the Rio Kid munched a thick sandwich, a lad of fourteen edged up to him and without speaking thrust a folded note into Pryor's left hand.

"What's this?" asked the Rio Kid, but the boy only shook his head and turned away.

Pryor shook out the paper and glanced at the hasty scrawl reading, "Meet me behind the saloon stable right away. C." He gave Mireles a nod and both started for the rear door.

Buffalo Bill Cody was waiting there for him in the blackness cast by the bulky stable.

"Rio Kid!" Cody gripped his hand. "Who's that with you? Mireles?"

"Yeah. What's wrong, Billy? We were stopped on our way in, and they asked about you."

"We can't talk here. Come along, and make it quiet. They'll drill us if they spot us."

The Rio Kid and Celestino followed the tall scout. A block from the Royal Flush, and not far from the river bluff, stood a tiny, darkened shack. Cody led them to it, tapped thrice on the door and entered.

When the door had been closed behind them, Buffalo Bill struck a match and lighted a candle stub. A blanket hung over the one small window of the hovel, while another covered the cracks of the sagging entry.

Cody swung and grinned in his pleasing, boyish manner, gripping the Rio Kid's hand.

"Mighty glad to see you, Rio Kid! You're a man to ride the river with in my books! I saw you cross the main street and pointed you out to that kid I sent in with the message."

Buffalo Bill was at the height of his manly power. Tall and elegant of figure in his fringed buckskins and moccasins, his long hair curled over his broad shoulders. His mustache and goatee were close-clipped, his eyes open and friendly. He stood just under six feet and was the embodiment of the courageous plainsman. He was one of the handsomest men Pryor had ever seen. He had been a Pony Express rider, a soldier, buffalo hunter, scout and showman.

"I thought you were prancing the boards in St. Louis," said the Rio Kid, smiling as he squatted down and rolled a quirly, passing around the makings. "Last time I heard, you and Wild Bill Hickok were a couple of fancy actors."

"We did fine," nodded Cody. "But I was called back to scout for the army. Something really big is up. We're working for General Eugene Asa Carr, commander of the Fifth Cavalry. The whole world's due to explode soon and we aim to dampen the fuses if we can."

The Rio Kid glanced at two strangers seated on a board in the mud-floored hovel. Both wore buckskin but he knew

they were not independent scouts such as Buffalo Bill. Cody introduced them.

"Rio Kid and Senor Mireles, shake with Lieutenant Harvey Eggleston and Sergeant Al Tate of the Fifth Cavalry."

Eggleston had the West Pointer's erect carriage and disciplined aspect. He was in his early twenties, a year or two out of the Military Academy. His hat was off, exposing black hair inclined to curl in the dampness. His features were keen and the brown eyes which fixed the Rio Kid were clear and very alert. The lieutenant was no doubt a friend of Cody's. The famous scout was probably teaching him the ways of the Frontier.

Sergeant Tate was a veteran, bearded and tough. His body was heavy but he was supple and powerful. Such noncoms were the backbone of the army. He would have fought in the Civil War, enlisted in the Regulars for Frontier duty and by now understand Indian fighting and the rough-and-tumble life of the wilds. His eyes held a shrewd look, and a tobacco cud was nestled under one side of his tongue.

Cody and his two companions were heavily armed, with pistols and hunting knives thrust into their belts, and carbines close at hand.

"I told you they asked me about you, Billy, when we were stopped under the gun," explained the Rio Kid. "A bunch of them claimed they were Vigilantes."

"Vigilantes!" Cody laughed and slapped his thigh. "That's a good one. Did you spy Vance Baldwin, better known as Baldy?"

"The tall one with the teeth?"

"That's him. He's the most dangerous gunrunner on the river. He's arming the Sioux and Blackfeet wholesale. Has a big band working for him—Missouri River wolves, every one. Mulehide Si Latham is his pard, and they say he's lately hooked up with Teton River Cal Doak, the rustler chief."

"I saw Doak once in Helena," Pryor said. "But he wasn't with them when I met up with Mulehide and Baldy."

"He's lurking around close at hand, I reckon."

"And you say Baldwin is arming the Sioux?"

"With the newest repeating rifles and ammunition galore," Cody explained. "General Carr had a tip on it. But it was figured the stuff would be unloaded at Fort Peck, closer to the Yellowstone. That was wrong. I managed to get on the right trail and hustled here, pulled in last evening. But some spy of Baldy's must have glimpsed me and reported I was around. We had a brush with them, took to the woods, then sneaked back after dark tonight. This hut belongs to a barkeeper at the Royal Flush, who works all night. He's an old pard of mine."

ACCORDING to army intelligence, thousands of savages were massing in southern Montana and northern Wyoming—Sioux and their blood brothers, the Cheyennes. They were commanded by the ablest of Indian generals—Gall of the Sioux, Sitting Bull, the medicine man, and Crazy Horse, the inspired leader of the Dog Soldiers. Renegade Blackfeet and other fierce young warriors had joined in. It was to be a war of extermination as the redmen fought for their last free foothold.

In their fastnesses in the Rocky Mountain foothills it was difficult to get at the savages and force them to join battle. The army had prepared an elaborate campaign involving several commands under Generals Terry, Gibbon, Crook, Custer and Carr.

"General Carr's responsible for this line from the Yellowstone to the mountain camps," went on Buffalo Bill. "If Baldy Baldwin wins he makes a fortune, for the Sioux have dug up all their hidden gold and have plenty of cash from pelts sold this spring. It's said the arms were shipped from St. Louis in boxes marked 'minin' machinery.' We figure they came in on the *Far West* yesterday, and now I believe the stuff's hid in Drew's warehouse."

"That's only a few hundred yards from here," said Pryor.

Buffalo Bill nodded. "I've got to get in and make sure, Rio Kid. I don't dare go off half-cocked. There's only a small garrison of infantry here in the old fort, and against the army of mounted killers Baldwin and Doak command they would not stand a chance. I must be absolutely certain about that contraband or the show will be wrecked. Baldy is mighty shifty. He had a strong guard around another building and I crawled in at the risk of my neck, only to find I'd been tricked."

"It's not likely Baldwin would leave

such valuable cargo unwatched," the Rio Kid observed. "But let's take a stab at it."

"*Bueno!* I figgered I could count on you, Rio Kid. And I can sure use your help."

Lieutenant Eggleston's eyes shone with repressed excitement but Sergeant Tate's never changed as he tongued his cud.

"Tell us exactly what we must do," suggested the lieutenant.

He had a fine voice, with a youthful note in it. The Rio Kid liked Eggleston. Once he had been a second lieutenant and had risen to captain. But it was difficult now for a good man to stay in the army, since it had been so reduced at the end of the War. Generals were serving as lieutenant colonels, even as majors and captains. A young fellow with ambition had to distinguish himself in some exceptional manner to hold his commission.

"We ought to have our horses saddled and ready, just in case anything goes sour, Billy," said the Rio Kid. "Celestino can tend to that. Where are your mounts?"

"Close by," answered Cody. "Sergeant, suppose you lead 'em in and let Mireles take over . . . Lieutenant, here's the plan. The Rio Kid and I sneak in and bust into the warehouse for a look-see. You take the southeast corner, the sergeant the northwest. That way, you can watch all four sides and whistle a signal if Baldy shows up while we're inside."

It was late as the five left the darkened shack. Mexican Mireles slipped away to take over the horses. Tate had led up the saddled animals belonging to Cody's party. A chunk of moon showed in the clearing sky over the Missouri. The muddy flow gleamed dully below as they stole along the ragged bluffs, hidden by the bulks of darkened warehouses and stores. Fort Benton was still whooping it up, pianos banging, fiddles and roulette wheels whining, men and women yelling as they riotously danced and drank.

The Rio Kid was a trained scout and had done such work before on the Frontier. He traveled close to the ground, Cody twenty yards to his right. They were on a rutted track which led to the main street and the docks. Big bull wagons and other vehicles lined the way. They could see objects against the yellow glow of the settlement.

WITH painsaking efforts, the Rio Kid and his friend made sure the large warehouse they reached, marked "Drew's," was unguarded. No lights showed inside the roomy structure, built of unseasoned lumber which had shrunk in the sun.

The Rio Kid snaked all the way around the long rectangle without bumping into trouble. He met Buffalo Bill in the shadow of a heavy wagon, deserted for the night like the others, the oxen and mules in corrals where they might be fed and tended.

"Everything's locked up tight, but we could pry off the hinges on that service door in the east wall," whispered the Rio Kid. "Plenty of crowbars around. All these bull wagons carry them to hoist out of the gumbo."

He found a heavy iron bar in a wagon, and the two Frontiersmen hurried to the end of the warehouse and the small entry.

Eggleston and Tate took up their positions, off a few yards from the diagonal corners so they could see the approaches.

As he applied pressure while Buffalo Bill held a gunnysack over the iron hinge to muffle the sound, the Rio Kid felt the staples giving way. Only slight creaks and a rattle or two escaped, and the bottom hinge snapped in half when Pryor put on pressure. The sharp crack of splitting iron might have been heard by anyone inside, but it would not carry far.

The Rio Kid went in first, Buffalo Bill standing by with drawn Colt in case hidden enemies might be waiting for them. It was black as pitch in there. Pryor put out a hand and touched the splintery edge of a large wooden box. He crouched, listening for possible guards. Cody joined him. The scout had brought along a bull's-eye lantern.

They hid the flare of the match as they lighted up, keeping the slide closed except for a narrow crack. By this light they could see that the warehouse was piled high with the heavy boxes, marked in large black letters "A. C. Jones, Last Chance Mine, Butte, Montana. Handle With Care. Machinery."

Many such shipments, legitimate ones, came up the Missouri for transshipment

by bull train to the Western mines.

Again the Rio Kid's crowbar came in handy. He inserted an end between two boards of a large case and pried up a section. Buffalo Bill turned the slitted bull's-eye on the contents. He removed some thick padding, then brought forth a long object wrapped in a piece of blanketing. It was a greased, shining new rifle.

"Newest make! This is it!" breathed Cody, excited in spite of himself. "The ammo will be in those different-shaped boxes. There's enough to take care of a small army here. Rio Kid, we got to scotch Baldy's game even if we have to set fire to this warehouse!"

Suddenly they heard a shrill triple whistle. They whirled, guns flying to hand as they made for the exit. It was the danger signal. At the jimmied door they caught the sound of many booted feet rushing toward the building.

A hundred guns seemed to roar a moment later. Colts cocked, the Rio Kid and Buffalo Bill jumped outside. Lieutenant Eggleston called frantically to them. He had run past the service door and stood at the upper corner, where he could see the road and the approaches from the center of town.

"They'll get Tate sure," gasped Cody.

Eggleston spurted on out of their sight before they came to the turn. Carbines, shotguns and pistols were blasting away and they could sense the lead as it shrieked through the air or plugged into the wooden walls and the gumbo. The gun flashes seemed to light the whole area. "It's Baldy!" the Rio Kid heard Cody shout. "There's Cal Doak, the big hombre!"

## CHAPTER III

### *LW Ranch*

BOTH scouts opened fire, blasting back at the charging enemy. A couple of figures in the lead stumbled and shrieked. The Rio Kid kept moving down the line, shifting position so he would not be an easy target.

Accurate lead from the Rio Kid and Cody smashed and swerved Baldwin's van. The wagons drawn up in the road gave some protection, but in a few jumps the swarming enemy would be all over them.

Not far away, in front of the warehouse, they found Eggleston, Al Tate's head cradled in his lap. He was shooting steadily at the attackers as he sought to protect his friend.

Cody ran on a couple of steps, empting his gun at the foe. The Rio Kid dropped beside the lieutenant, ran a hasty hand over Tate's face and head.

"No use, Lieutenant," he said grimly. "Come on, run for it. He's dead—shot through the brain!"

Eggleston shuddered violently. He grunted and then fell against the Rio Kid. He had been hit, the rifle bullet plunging into his side. The slug would have struck Pryor had not the lieutenant been there.

"Hustle!" Cody cried as he rushed back. "We don't have much time."

More and more men were boring in. The Rio Kid grasped Eggleston under the arms, Buffalo Bill by the ankles. They ran for it around the end of the building, sheltered for a moment.

"General! General!" It was Mireles, riding his handsome paint horse, leading Saber and the other mounts.

Without loss of a single motion the scouts threw the wounded man across his saddle, looped him there with the ready lariat. They hit leather and rode along the river bank. The Rio Kid and Mireles dropped behind to send back discouraging slugs.

Baldwin's attackers were some distance off, however. They gained a good start but it was desperate work. The Rio Kid and Cody were well aware they were not dealing with ordinary cowardly bandits. Baldy Baldwin and "Teton River" Doak would shoot down any follower who showed the white feather.

They were cut off from the ford above the town, from the fort. There was no time to do anything but ride for it and they swung north. That way lay rolling prairies, broken now and then by rocky outcroppings, farther on dun-colored hills and wooded ridges. They made a mile but the enemy horsemen were coming on, spread out in a wide line to sweep them up. As they climbed out of the river valley they glanced back at the numerous dark forms against

the moonlit sky.

"Rio Kid!" sang out Buffalo Bill.

The urgency in the scout's voice caused Pryor to send Sabor streaking to overtake his friend. Cody was leading the mustang on which jolted the limp figure of Lieutenant Eggleston.

"He's bleeding to death," declared Buffalo Bill. "If we don't stop and give that hole a chance to close up he'll cash in his chips."

Against the hairy hide of the horse the Rio Kid noted the damp shine of Eggleston's lifeblood.

"We can't stop here on the prairie, Billy. They'd be on us in no time. Isn't there any place we could hide for a spell? How about that creek which runs into the Marias?"

"That's all right," agreed Buffalo Bill. "I wish we could get him to Lease Ward's ranch but it's too far, over near the Teton."

"Ward's spread is around ten miles from Benton, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Ward's all right. He's a Texan, drove his longhorn herd up here a couple of years ago."

They kept moving, anxiously watching Eggleston who was hardly conscious. Now and then he gave a weak groan.

"I hate to lose him," went on Buffalo Bill. "Maybe I shouldn't have fetched him on this scout. But he's a mighty fine lad and picking it up fast. One of the bravest young coots I ever ran with, too. And General Carr wanted one of his officers along with me for official reasons. Dawg it, too many of these boys have lost their hair out here! His folks live in Hartford, Connecticut."

The Rio Kid could follow Cody's apparently unconnected thoughts. Buffalo Bill felt responsible for Eggleston, was very fond of his pupil. Many daring men had fallen, hit by Indian arrow or bullet. Some had not yet been found, their bleached bones lying on the limitless prairie or in some secluded gulch or grove.

"Is he hitched?" asked the Rio Kid.

"Nope, he's a bachelor. Only son, too."

MIRELES was about two hundred yards behind them and his carbine kept crackling as he exchanged fire with the advance riders of the enemy.

"We'll make for that creek bottom," said Bob Pryor. "One of us will have to hide in the brush with the lieutenant, while the other two try to draw Baldy and Teton Cal off, savvy? How do you want to work it?"

"You take care of Eggleston," Cody said. "Baldwin hates me, he'll trail me to Hades and back. I'll let him have a good look at me before I draw ahead."

"*Bueno!* I'll tie up that wound, and soon as possible will head for Ward's ranch. You want to meet me there?"

"No, I better not. I don't want to wreck Ward. Baldy and Doak will go for him if they savvy he's a friend of mine. Listen, about a mile north of Ward's LW Ranch is a wooded hill split by a spirelike butte. There's a spring up there and it overlooks the creek valley. Meet me there in the afternoon—that is, if we all make it."

Emergency plans quickly made, they came over a low rise. Below showed the brakes of a creek bottom, stands of woods, great boulders and stretches of rock shadowed black in the night, a high shoulder cutting off the moon.

"Take him, Rio Kid. Luck to you."

Cody passed over the reins of Eggleston's horse. The Rio Kid went down a slide, Saber's hoofs digging in. Eggleston's mustang stumbled, nearly fell, but a quick jerk on the bit kept up his head.

Buffalo Bill was making his play on the rise. The scout's challenging war whoops rang shrill in the cool air as he tore along the face of the advancing line, throwing lead at them. Baldy Baldwin and Teton River Doak could recognize their antagonist in the gun flashes and Buffalo Bill took care to roar jibes which left no doubt in their minds as to who he was.

Pryor kept his mouth shut. It was a tossup whether his or Cody's job was the more perilous. It depended entirely on whether the powerful foe realized he had dropped out of the parade. At least, Buffalo Bill was free to ride for it, but the Rio Kid was committed to defend Eggleston to the end.

He reached the high, thick brush and jumped down. Holding both reins, he drew in the horses after him. For a time he stood there, listening to the terrific firing and fierce cries wrecking the peace of the prairies above.

Gradually this died away and the Rio Kid realized he could hear the pounding of his own heart, the gentle murmuring of water not far off. Eggleston, still

slung across the saddle, grunted very faintly.

Pryor made a brush bed, freed the limp body and lifted the officer to the ground, stretching him on his back. Nearby he found the brook, cool and clear, and filled his canteen. Squatting beside Eggleston, he began his work. By sense of touch he cut away the soaked, torn shirt. He had a clean one of his own in a saddle-bag and tore it into wide strips.

He needed to see the wound, however, and cupped a match in his hand and had a quick look. He bit his lip as the tiny flame exposed the jagged bullet tear in the lieutenant's left side, under the heart. A couple of ribs gleamed white and bare as he gently swabbed away with a water-soaked cloth holding a second match in his other hand.

Most of the time he could work without light. He folded several strips to make pads. The cold water, the cessation of jolting helped slow down the bleeding. The Rio Kid made a good emergency patch on Eggleston and bound it firmly in position.

Then he went to the rise and checked up. Far off to the northeast he heard a few faint cracks which told him that Cody and Celestino were still at it, leading on Baldy Baldwin.

The Rio Kid fixed himself a smoke and spent about an hour there, giving Nature a chance to act on Eggleston's wound. If Eggleston survived the shock and loss of blood, the lieutenant would have to lie up, be nursed and fed. That was where Lease Ward's ranch came in.

A MISTY dawn was breaking as the Rio Kid slowly rode into the yard of the LW Ranch. The ranch stood above high-water mark on a little branch of the Teton. Ward's cows ranged between the Marias and Teton Rivers and in the late spring the grass was virgin and green. There had been enough rain that year.

A confused bellowing filled the air. A few hundred longhorn steers were hanging around the ranch, mournfully complaining of their lot. They had been driven to this colder northern climate from Texas and they did not like it.

The Rio Kid knew that many herds had been trailed up from the south to stock the Wyoming and Montana ranges.

The long lash snapped out at the Rio Kid (CHAP. XI)

Texas cowboys had come along. Some stayed, others shivered for one winter and then hurried back to the Rio Grande.

Lease Ward had been there about two years ago, and the animals he had brought back with him would either have become acclimatized or have died off. The cattle around the buildings were undoubtedly newcomers, perhaps purchased in Salt Lake City by the rancher. Steers fattened on the northern ranges brought good money in any market, and the mining camps were hungry for beef.

A faint puff of wind, the start of a morning breeze, brought to the Rio Kid's nostrils the delicious odor of coffee coming to a boil. "I could sure do with a cup," he thought. He was starved, too, the cold hardtack he'd eaten along the way hardly a satisfactory meal.

A man stepped from the kitchen door and stood for a moment staring at him. The Rio Kid made the sign of peace and the big fellow came toward him. He wore leather boots with cartwheel spurs. His brick-hued head was bared, his complexion florid. His features were large and he had a self-confident air.

"Howdy there, stranger!" he shouted. 'Light and set." Bob Pryor could have told he was a Texan from his voice and manner. "I'm Lease Ward and this is my spread."

"Good morning, sir. I brought you a present."

The Rio Kid got down and jerked a thumb at Eggleston, who was fastened over the spare horse's saddle.

"Why, he's white as a lily!" Ward cried. "Is he still kicking?"

"Yes, but he's bad hurt," Pryor informed.

Lease Ward swung on him, staring more carefully at the Rio Kid. Pryor guessed what he was thinking. The wild range was full of wolfish outlaws preying on the miners and ranchers, on decent men. Ward was trying to size up his visitors.

"I'm the Rio Kid, Mister Ward. I'm a friend of Buffalo Bill Cody's. This wounded hombre is Lieutenant Harvey Eggleston, U. S. Army. We had a brush with a passel of rapscallions bossed by Baldy Baldwin and Teton River Cal Doak last night and the lieutenant caught one."

Ward swore sulphurously. "One of these days I'm goin' to put a slug right between Doak's ugly eyes," he promised. "He's been running off my cows. And I believe him and his wolves killed one of my riders who caught 'em at it last week." He raised his voice so it would carry above the lowing of the steers. "Mama! Carolyn!"

A slim young woman came out, wearing a blue dress and a white apron. She carried a large iron spoon in one hand. She was very pretty and the Rio Kid watched her as the wind touched her coppery hair. She was a strawberry blonde, about nineteen or twenty, and as attractive a girl as Pryor had ever seen.

"What do you want, Papa?" she called. "Mama's busy cooking."

"We got company," replied Ward. "One of 'em's all shot up." To the Rio Kid, he said, "That's my girl Carolyn, best daughter a man ever had. My wife will be here in a jiffy. I reckon we ought to put the lieutenant to bed pronto."

He helped the Rio Kid undo the knots holding Eggleston from falling off his horse.

"Dawg bite those cussed Texas steers!" he remarked. "I just had them run through from Salt Lake market to fatten. They been complaining ever since they got here."

A couple of cowboys appeared around the barn and blinked as they saw Ward and the Rio Kid carrying the horizontal form between them. A plumpish woman of forty met them. She had her brown hair drawn back in a bun and wore an apron over her tight-waisted, bustled dress, the skirts full-gathered and brushing the ground. Her oval face was soft and Pryor could see where Carolyn's beauty came from.

The girl followed her mother and both women stared curiously at the utterly limp Eggleston, then at the Rio Kid. Next a boy of twelve shot from the open door, rushing up.

"Hey, Pop! Who's that, who's that?"

"A poor feller who got shot, Buddy."

Trailing Ward's son came three waddies who had been in the kitchen. Breakfast had proved a drawing card, but now everybody grew excited as they realized the unconscious man was not drunk but had been hurt. Willing hands relieved Ward and the Rio Kid of the burden. Mrs. Ward and Carolyn hurried up the hall and fixed a bed in a side room. Here Eggleston was laid out.

"Go put on more water to boil, Caro-

lyn," ordered Mrs. Ward. "Move, don't stand there gaping, child!"

The strawberry blonde had been staring down at the young officer's drawn face, pale under his coating of tan.

"Poor fellow," she said. "Yes, Mother, I'll go."

## CHAPTER IV

### *Rendezvous With Cody*

PRYOR trailed the girl out into the kitchen and watched her dip water from a wooden tub into a large pan. "Who is the wounded man, sir?" asked the girl as she worked.

"He's Lieutenant Harvey Eggleston, ma'am. U. S. Army scout. Outlaws shot him in Fort Benton last night. It's going to be a job to pull him through."

She glanced at him without saying anything more. She poured a cup of steaming coffee from a big pot, filled a tin plate with fried potatoes and strips of beef and set it before the Rio Kid.

"I know a hungry man when I see one," she remarked.

"*Gracias*, ma'am."

"Oh, you're from Texas?" There was a homesick look in her eyes. She had grown up there and was not yet resigned to the raw Montana land. "I miss home a lot. It's mighty lonesome up here. I don't like Fort Benton much, it's so rough."

She soon left, carrying hot water to her mother, who remained at Eggleston's side. Lease Ward joined the Rio Kid, helping himself to coffee and food, and sat down to chat. Pryor gave the rancher a quick sketch of what had occurred. Meanwhile, Buddy and five cowboys entered and began to eat breakfast.

Sleep clutched now at the Rio Kid's eyelids. He had been on the go since dawn twenty-four hours ago. Ward was grumbling about Doak and Baldwin.

"Cuss them, they sell the Indians guns and they pick us off whenever they've a mind to. The Blackfeet range through here and they're mighty nasty."

After a smoke, the Rio Kid asked if he might sleep. Ward led him to the bunkhouse.

"You'll be quieter here," he explained. "I'll see you ain't disturbed."

Pryor thanked him. "I don't figure they'll track us here, Mister Ward. I rode up the creek a ways and cut the sign. You better warn your folks to keep shut about the lieutenant. It might draw Baldwin and Doak if they savvy he's in your home."

"I'll do that. Pleasant dreams."

When the Rio Kid awakened the bunkhouse was warm as toast from the afternoon sun beating on the roof. He felt greatly refreshed, and rising, washed up and fixed a smoke. The cowboys had chased the complaining longhorns out on the prairie to graze.

Pryor went into the house, paused at the open door of the small room in which Eggleston lay. The officer's eyes were closed. His face had a frail, ascetic look and he did not move a muscle.

Carolyn Ward sat at his head in a straight chair, watching him. She glanced at the Rio Kid and nodded, touched her lips with a finger.

Mrs. Ward was in the kitchen. "His heart's all right," she told Pryor, as he inquired about Eggleston. "But he lost too much blood. The next twenty-four hours means a lot. I'm brewing beefstock broth so he'll have strength to fight."

"You're very kind, ma'am."

The Wards were splendid folks, courageous pioneers, warm-hearted, ready to help those in distress. Pryor found Lease Ward at a horse corral behind the barn and told him he was riding off to meet Cody.

"I'll run back soon and see how the lieutenant's doing, though. We're mighty grateful."

Ward gave a breezy wave of the hand. "Forget it. You're welcome any time, and Cody, too. We'll take care of the boy."

The Rio Kid saddled Saber and set forth, taking the trail north along the west bank of the creek. Now and then he saw bunches of grazing steers, and several of the big longhorns, when they noticed the rider, started for him, lowing. They were some of the new lot and determined to tell mankind their troubles.

Farther along he came close to a dozen cows and could read the brands on their

scarred hides. The LW predominated but there was a second one, a Square H.

Soon he sighted a towering hill off on his left as he rode upstream. An immense rock spire thrust to the blue sky from the center of the hill. It was just about the same hue as Saber's dun skin. Pryor noted a winding trace where a small run of water made its way down to the stream. He was certain this was Buffalo Bill's point of rendezvous.

Making sure there were no possible enemies in the vicinity, he swung off and rode up a steep slope, working his way to the summit. The trees soon hid him and he walked Saber, listening and watching. Cody and Celestino Mireles, if there, would certainly have spied him.

A VOICE hailed him then. "General!" It was Mireles. The Mexican ran up and seized his hand. There was a stained bandage around his left forearm and a deep gash in one brown cheek where a sharp branch or bullet fragment had slashed him.

"Celestino! You're not hurt much, I can see that. Where's Cody?"

"Come, we wait for you." Celestino led the way up the brook. Pryor soon had to dismount and lead the dun as the brush grew more dense. The spring issued from the split base of the towering butte and there was a clear pool trapped by rocks and conveniently screened by undergrowth. Here was Buffalo Bill, watching them as they came in. The other two horses were held back from the water, not far from the bivouac.

"Greetings, Rio Kid." Cody winked and nodded. "I reckoned you'd make it. Your pard was worried but I said you'd be along." Buffalo Bill was cool and collected as usual.

"Have any trouble shaking Baldwin's gang off?" inquired Pryor, as he squatted beside his friends and passed around the makin's.

"Took us a couple hours, but here we are. I covered our trail up here. How's Eggleston?"

"As good as you could hope. It's six of one, half a dozen of the other. He's bled white. I got him to Ward's and the women are nursing him."

Cody stared at the shimmering pool of spring water for a time. He made no comment as to the lieutenant. Then he turned to Mireles.

"Get up there and keep your eye peeled, will you?" he asked. "I want to make talk."

Celestino silently moved off toward the spire to stand guard.

"Things are mighty sour, Rio Kid," Cody said. "It's hair in the butter. Those guns are dynamite and the whole frontier will explode in our faces once the Sioux get their red hands on 'em. General Carr must be warned immediately, so he can take what steps he thinks best. He's holding the Missouri line, savvy? I hate to leave these parts long enough to contact him, for I've got to keep an eye on those weapons. Maybe I can creep in and fire that warehouse before Baldy Baldwin moves the stuff."

"You want me to run a message to General Carr?" Pryor asked. "Where is he?"

"He's camped ten miles east of the Marias, waiting to hear from me. You savvy the old trapper's shack, up on the bank near Bearloop crossin'?"

The Rio Kid nodded. "I've been through there."

"He's only got a small detachment with him, for he's way off base. We were hoping some of the gunrunners might show up down there and Carr could grab prisoners and make them talk. If he gets here pronto, though, maybe he can join with the handful of soldiers at the fort and drive off Baldy Baldwin."

"I'll tell him," Pryor said. "I'll travel a sight faster than the troopers. Where do you want me to meet you?"

"I aim to make a stab at the warehouse. I figure Baldwin will have every approach guarded, that's a cinch. Tell you what. I'll have Celestino leave a message for you at Ward's, if we don't meet on the road when you're comin' back. I won't show at the LW. If Doak and Baldy savvied Ward's a friend of mine and shieldin' Eggleston, they'd wipe out that ranch in two shakes of a calf's tail."

Buffalo Bill was grim. Mireles came sliding around the rock bulge, a finger on his lips. "They are below, at the river," whispered the Mexican.

"Is it Baldy Baldwin?" asked Cody quickly.

"No. But there are some of those who fought us."

The Rio Kid went to get his field glasses from his gear. When he rejoined

## GENERAL EUGENE ASA CARR

### "THE WAR EAGLE" (1830-1910)

BORN in New York state, General Carr attended West Point and served on the Frontier for several years before the Civil War, fighting Indians. He distinguished himself in the War, winning the Medal of Honor and rising to the brevet rank of Major General of Volunteers.

Carr was a superb horseman and a born cavalry leader. "I'd rather be a colonel of cavalry than the Czar of Russia!" he once declared. The Indians called him the "War Eagle." Married in 1865, during the next quarter century Carr commanded the 5th and 6th Cavalry on the Frontier, fighting Sioux, Cheyennes and Apaches. He became a brigadier general in the regular army.

It is said that General Carr was probably the ablest and most experienced Indian fighter of the quarter century following the Civil War, which is quite a statement since this would put him above Generals Custer, Miles, Crook, and Sheridan.

Carr was a fine-looking man, with wide-set eyes arched over by thick brows. He had a steady manner, and was unperturbed by danger. In the fashion of his day he wore a mustache and beard. Retiring in '93 as a brigadier, he lived to the age of 80.

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his friends, Cody and Mireles were flattened out, peeking between boulders at the enemy along the creek. The Rio Kid crawled up, and taking care the light did not reflect from the lenses, focused the glasses.

"The big one in the flat hat is Teton River Cal Doak," whispered Buffalo Bill. "I've bumped into tough hombres in my day, but he's the limit. He raids the ranches and gold camps and once he even held up a steamboat coming up-river! That's just part of his bunch. They say he can command as many loco wolves as he needs. And he has no trouble finding them either."

BOB PRYOR had had only glimpses of the mighty Doak and he studied the outlaw chieftain carefully now. Doak stood on the bank, facing him, and was smoking a cigarette. Fifteen more men, all armed, were with him. Teton River Cal wore leather and heavy black boots. He would certainly weigh over two-fifty on the hoof, decided the Rio Kid.

The fierce, scowling face was black-bearded, his nose was mashed and his sunken eyes glinted. Crossed bandoliers rode over beefy shoulders, supporting his pistols, and in one hand he grasped a new carbine. He took off his hat to sweep back the matted black hair on his massive head and said something to one of his followers, who was watering his horse.

Several outlaws stood ankle-deep in the creek, holding their mounts' reins. They scooped up water in their Stetsons to drink. It was plain they were weary and out of sorts. No doubt they had been trying for hours to pick up Cody's sign, but Buffalo Bill had confused and hidden the trail too skillfully. Doak had drifted this way and was closer to his quarry than he knew.

Doak swung about, facing downstream. He pointed that way and said something to a wolfish crony. This play worried the Rio Kid and he voiced it. "I believe they're talking of Ward's Billy. They might make a blind stab there, just on an off chance. If those lobos decide to head to the ranch it means trouble."

"Maybe we better sting them and draw them off," Cody suggested. "I hate to do it."

They braced themselves, determined to save Ward at all costs. But it could spell another delay in their plans, perhaps a fatal one.

One of Doak's riders, who had stooped to scoop up a drink for himself, crouched low and felt around in the running stream. He sang out to Doak, who stepped closer. Then all gathered around and in a minute were wading in the shallows, but the fringe of brush and the drop of the bank cut them off for the most part from Pryor's view.

Before long they remounted, splashed back to the east side and galloped off at a slant which, if they held to it, would take them to Fort Benton.

"All to the good," remarked Buffalo Bill. "They're not headed for Ward's, that's a cinch. You ready to start, Rio Kid?"

"On the dot. You want to write anything?"

"No. Tell General Carr what happened. He'll decide what's next. He's a great hombre. Ever serve under him?"

"Never had the pleasure, but I've seen him and heard a lot about him. A fine soldier."

"He sure is. He was on the Frontier years before the big war. For my money he's the most experienced and the best Indian fighter in the army."

They returned to the horses. Mireles would remain with Cody as the scout sought to watch the dangerous contraband they had located in Benton. Pryor checked his gear, made sure his guns were loaded. He had eaten well and had slept at the LW, and he felt fresh as a daisy. Leading Saber from the thickets, he waved *adios* to his friends, mounted and cut down a slope toward the river.

"We'll stick to the north line till we've bypassed Fort Benton, Saber," he murmured. "That way, we won't come up on Doak's heels."

The horse tossed his head, lining out as they reached the opposite bank, and soon was flashing across rolling prairie.

The moon was up and pickets had halted the Rio Kid as he came close to the broken-down trapper's shack where he expected to find General Carr. They had passed him through and a sergeant led him to the hut. The troopers, save for the sentries around the bivouac, had turned in. They had made themselves comfortable by cutting brush and setting up crude shelter and couches.

From the spot the flowing Missouri could be seen, dully gleaming in the night. A steep cut angled down to the river, which could be crossed here, although it was necessary to swim the shifting, treacherous channel. In many sections the clay banks were so high and precipitous they could not be negotiated.

Carr's camp was in excellent military shape. There was nothing sloppy about his discipline. The guide rapped on the half-open door of the one-room shack. A lantern burned inside and through the crack the Rio Kid saw the general, now acting as colonel of the Fifth Cavalry. Carr wore his blue tunic and trousers, as he sat there on an upended log, reading Caesar's Commentaries. At the knock, he looked up and told them to enter.

The sergeant and the Rio Kid gave him a smart salute. Carr had won the Medal of Honor and had distinguished himself during the Civil War, having a brevet rank of major general.

"This is the Rio Kid, sir," reported the sergeant. "He's from Buffalo Bill Cody and has an important message."

"Happy to see you." Carr shut his book and laid it on the sagging table, made from log slabs.

The sergeant left and the Rio Kid began his report.

## CHAPTER V

### *Pryor Meets General Carr*

GENERAL CARR was a splendid-looking man in his middle forties. His wide-set eyes were arched by shaggy brows, and he wore a mustache and clipped beard in the fashion. His dark hair came to a rounded point in front, with bald inlets on either side. He was very calm and steady, never taking his eyes off Pryor as the latter spoke. Called the "War Eagle" by the Indians, General Eugene Asa Carr was noted as a superb horseman and born cavalry leader.

As soon as he had heard what the Rio Kid had to say, he called the sergeant.

"Ask Captain Trevers to report to me immediately," he ordered.

He pushed a flask and tincup to the visitor and offered Pryor a Cuban cheroot.

"I'm sorry to lose Sergeant Tate. He was with me a long time and one of the best." Carr had seen many friends die in battle and he had never grown hardened to it. Though he had perfect control over himself, he was inwardly shaken by the bad tidings. "Let's hope Lieutenant Eggleston recovers. I'll get there to see him as soon as possible. You're a friend of Cody's, I take it. He's a great scout and a splendid man."

"That he is, sir," Pryor agreed. Then: "I served under Generals Sheridan and Custer during the war, General. I'm sorry I missed being with you."

"Some of them have gone a long way, haven't they?" Carr smiled as he reminisced. "Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, many others. Here I am, still in the saddle. Well, I'd rather be a colonel of cavalry than Czar of Russia."

The Rio Kid knew he meant that, and he understood. Campaigning got into a man's blood and was hard to give up. Carr was perfectly contented with his lot. The Rio Kid gulped down his drink. "Sir," he said then, "I'd like to start back. Is there anything you want me to tell Cody?"

"Yes. I'll come up as fast as possible, will start within the hour. I'll write a message to the commandant at Fort Benton. Do you think you can deliver it?"

"I'll make a stab at it, General. But Baldwin and his men have Benton sewed up tight."

"Do your best. I'll scatter those river wolves when I pull in. If the commander at Benton can reach that warehouse, maybe he can hold out till I arrive." Carr was scratching out the despatch, talking as he wrote. "Tell Cody I'll meet him in Benton. Let's hope we seize those guns."

The lives of thousands might depend on the mission. Of that, the Rio Kid was only too well aware. He was in a rush to return to Fort Benton so he could rejoin Cody and Celestino.

The scout accepted the letter, shoved it in a pocket, stepped back and saluted smartly. Carr trailed him outside and watched him jump to the saddle.

A trim young aide hurried to the general's side. Pryor was on the backtrail when the bugle sounded. The cavalry bivouac was a nostalgic scene for the Rio Kid, who had lived in this fashion during the war. Saber, too, shivered with excitement as he heard the ringing notes.

General Carr would make the fastest possible time to Fort Benton. Yet even with a small number of troopers it would be slower than the Rio Kid's run. Saber was far superior to the ordinary army mount. The soldiers must get ready, saddle their horses, and on the road the pace would not amount to more than a jog.

The Rio Kid crossed the Marias and hurried on. The moon was low and Fort Benton only a few miles westward. On his left hand now and then he glimpsed the sullen Missouri, clay-colored in hue. Snow was still melting in the Rockies, the rills and torrents running into the three streams—the Jefferson, Madison

and Gallatin—which met at Three Forks to form the great main river.

The swift dun rippled the black stripe down his spine and laid back his ear. He sniffed in distaste. Immediately the Rio Kid slowed, pulled off the trail and stopped.

"What is it, Saber? Indians?"

It was. The keen animal had caught a distinctive scent. The Rio Kid, his horse hidden off the track, stole toward the bluffs overlooking the Missouri. Not far away was a crossing, the clay banks crumbling so a path could snake down to the brown tide. Pryor lay flat, peeking over the edge, a stand of brush black behind him so that he did not show against the sky.

On the expanse he could see black dots, men and horses swimming the deeper channels, wading where it was possible. There were more on the south bank just entering, while many more who had come over bunched on this side.

He inched closer and closer until he was over an indented shelf. He caught snatches of guttural voices. They were Sioux, Cheyennes with them. He tried to estimate their number but more and more churned in. They kept rifle and pouches dry by holding them aloft in one hand while with the other they gripped the tail or mane of the horse during the swim. Powerful bronzed bodies gleamed, wet with Missouri water. They wore eagle feathers, breechclouts, and were painted for war.

The advance guard had already climbed to the road. Indians jumped on their mounts and flowed up the cut. Now and then a loose stone would roll, a man would grunt, an animal snort, but all in all it was most efficient and quiet.

The Rio Kid waited, thinking it might be a comparatively small raiding party. But they kept coming. Something akin to panic snatched at Pryor. If the ferocious horde swung east on this side they would bump into General Carr and his handful of troopers and massacre the whites.

CAUTIOUSLY The Rio Kid wormed off, for there seemed no end to the red tide. Finally he reached the road, crouching behind a rock upthrust from a clay bank. With deep relief he found the redskins had taken the other direction and were headed toward Fort Benton.

It was most unlikely they would attack the settlement. They did not like to fight opponents sheltered in buildings. Had they turned his way it would have meant practical suicide for him to try and pass them in order to reach Carr and warn the general. He could hide where he was, between the savages and the troops, and he decided this to be his best course for the moment.

It was an hour before he dared emerge, mount Saber and trail carefully after the savages. He had to stop often to listen, and check on the road ahead before proceeding. Three miles out of Fort Benton, he found that the Sioux had swung off the trail.

It took Pryor some time to come on them again. The first touch of dawn was behind him as the Rio Kid spied on the conclave. More Indians than he had ever seen before were gathered in the red array. Pryor had spent precious time creeping to a position from which he might observe the proceedings.

At the northeast corner of the flat, a spring emerged from a rocky hillside and flowed off toward the Missouri. On this slight elevation was a patch of woods and stands of brush which gave the scout cover, so long as he stayed flattened out.

Impatient bands of mustangs awaited the pleasure of their savage owners. Their manes and tails were decorated with strips of colored cloth twined in the coarse hair. He sought to count the horses but there were thousands.

Creaking sounds reached him, carried on the faint west wind springing up with the new day. Long wagons, each drawn by eight draft animals, rumbled up on the other side of the area and the Indians crowded around these.

The light was rapidly growing better. Pryor could make out individuals and features. Baldy Baldwin was boss of the wagon train. Teton River Cal Doak was on hand, as was Mulehide Si Latham, the latter in his element as he cursed and cracked his long whip, swinging the heavy vehicles down the slope and around into line. Missouri River wolves, followers of Baldwin and Doak, watched curiously from their saddles as their leaders conferred with several chiefs.

"Crazy Horse! Gall! Sitting Bull!..." The Rio Kid breathed the names of the great generals of the Cheyennes and of the Sioux. They called Gall "The Sioux

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## WILLIAM FREDERICK CODY

### "BUFFALO BILL" (1846-1917)

WILLIAM FREDERICK CODY was born in Iowa in 1846. In 1854 his family moved to Kansas. Cody's father died in 1857 and the 11-year-old boy took his place as breadwinner for the family, first helping drive supply trains across the plains, then serving as a Pony Express rider.

When the Civil War broke out he fought with the Kansas Jayhawkers, then joined the 9th Kansas Cavalry as a scout against the Kiowas and Comanches who were raiding the settlements. A year after the close of the War, Cody married. He worked for Goddard Brothers, food purveyors for the Kansas Pacific builders, supplying buffalo meat and his remarkable exploits along this line earned him his nickname and gave rise to the jingle: "Buffalo Bill, Buffalo Bill, never missed and never will. He always aims and shoots to kill, and the company pays the buffalo bill."

Cody met the writer, Ned Buntline, on the Frontier, and they became great friends. Buntline wrote a vaudeville sketch called "Scouts of the Prairie" for Cody, and for several years Buffalo Bill played the boards with Texas Jack Omohundro and Wild Bill Hickok.

The Sioux War which broke out in '75 brought him back to the plains as chief of scouts for the 5th Cavalry. On July 17, 1876 occurred the celebrated duel between Cody and Yellow Hand, the Cheyenne chief.

After many daring exploits, Cody joined Major Frank North to set up a cattle business in Nebraska. Later Buffalo Bill began staging his Wild West exhibitions which took him all over the world. Fame and wealth came to him before he died in 1917.

General Eugene A. Carr said of him: "His eyesight is better than a good field glass. He's a perfect judge of distance and the lay of the country. Lithe and active, Cody is a masterful rider and expert shot. . . ."

Buffalo Bill, tall and supple in his buckskins, his dark-brown hair flowing to his shoulders, was a magnificent specimen of manhood.

Napoleon." Sitting Bull was a medicine man who had proved constantly troublesome. Crazy Horse was the inspired leader of the Dog Soldiers, the Cheyennes. There were other famous chiefs present.

Buckskin sacks were passed to Baldy Baldwin. He would open each one, test the contents by pouring a little into his hand. The Rio Kid caught the dull gleam of gold. It was cash on the barrelhead as the customers paid for the new rifles and ammunition delivered to them by the renegades.

Now the outlaws dismounted and at Baldwin's command passed out the guns from the opened cases. They filled Indian skin bags with ammunition. The savages grunted in approval as picked white members of the crew explained the mechanism of the guns to them. Some loaded and fired into the rise on which the Rid Kid lay hidden. Heavy slugs plugged into the clay not far from him, but they were only trying out the weapons and had no idea he was hidden there.

Intent on gaining all possible information for General Carr and Buffalo Bill, the Rio Kid observed the exchange as Baldwin armed the Sioux and Cheyennes for modern warfare. It was a bitter moment. Baldwin had won the round. Many men must now die because of the rangy killer's greed.

Baldwin removed his black Stetson. His pate was entirely bald, shining in the morning light. He wiped it with a bandanna, and some of the Indians pointed and jeered because he had no hair. Baldy ran his bony hand over his ridged skull and then replaced the hat.

Cal Doak was rolling a quirly. The Indians demanded tobacco. Baldwin had anticipated that and passed out navy plug.

Neither side, however, desired to linger. The usual parleying was dispensed with and the Indian leaders ordered off their braves. The fighters picked up their mustangs and began fading away toward the Missouri. Baldy Baldwin, Teton River Doak and most of their men mounted and rode off toward Fort Benton, the wagons following under Mulehide Si Latham's direction.

Before long the meeting place was emptied and the Rio Kid crept off, picked up Saber and rode eastward, parallel with the highway.

SOON Pryor grew aware of two riders coming toward him on a slant from the northwest. Swinging in the saddle, he studied them and recognized them. It was Buffalo Bill, Celestino at his side and he waved to them.

They joined him, horses lathered. Cody was grim.

"Did you find General Carr?" was the first thing he said.

"I found him. He's on his way."

"I reckon it's too late."

The Rio Kid nodded. "Baldwin passed out those rifles to the Indians, Billy. We've lost this round. Never get them back now except one by one."

It was evident the savages would split up, move swiftly on their tough mustangs to the fastnesses of the Rockies from which they had emerged. They were planning a great war to exterminate the white invaders.

Pryor learned that Cody and the Mexican had tried to reach the warehouse in Benton, to set it afire if possible, but it had been ringed with armed killers. Seeking to warn the commandant at the adobe fort, the two had bumped into Cal Doak and more of the wolfish outlaws. Blasted off, nearly downed by sheer force, they had been run out of the settlement, pursued, till they had managed to shake off the foe.

In the first touch of dawn, the scouts had tracked the wagon train, spied it as it made rendezvous with the savages. It had proved impossible for Buffalo Bill to get as close to the gathering as had the Rio Kid. But Pryor supplied him with what details he lacked.

The trio rode finally in silence, each busy with his thoughts. Every soul in the northwest was now in ceaseless peril. Small towns, gold camps, hunters and trappers, river passengers, must pay with their lives. The soldiers coming in would have a much more difficult task against the red enemy, now armed with superior weapons.

It was close to nine o'clock when they met General Carr. The sun was warm, and the troopers had drawn off the road to rest their horses and listen to the general orders for the attack on Baldwin's band. A cold meal had been snatched and the soldiers were smoking.

Cody and the Rio Kid rode in, dropped from their mounts. Carr had on his campaign hat, strapped to his bearded chin. He was unperturbed and firm as

usual. The scouts saluted and reported the bad news.

Carr's face did not change. They could only guess how he felt when they saw the tightness of his lips. He gave a short nod.

"We'll move on into Benton. I'll arrest Baldwin and Doak if they're around."

He signaled his aide and Captain Trevers relayed the commands. Sergeants roused their squads, the saddles were cinched on, and the men stood to horse.

The scouts were not subject to military discipine. At Carr's invitation they rode at either side of the general as they took the highway for Fort Benton, hoping to gain at least the satisfaction of revenge on the renegade gunrunners.

There was not the slightest sign of an Indian. In the clay road, the heavy wagons which had carried the guns and ammunition had left fresh ruts. Many of the vehicles stood along the streets. The warehouse gaped empty in the morning light as Carr led his troopers into town.

Now the settlement was humming with activity of a different sort. Muleskinners and bullwhackers cursed and raved as they whipped their teams up the slope from the docks, loaded with freight for Helena, Butte and other camps to the southwest in the Rockies. Roustabouts were busy on the wharves.

Men and women in the streets stared at the troopers as Carr and the scouts swung into the main way, trailed by the squadron. Carr had but a small force with him but they were seasoned troopers and disciplined.

"There's Baldwin, up there in front of the Royal Flush saloon," said the Rio Kid.

A carbine slug shrieked within an inch of General Carr's head, passing between him and Pryor. Carr did not turn a hair. He waved an order and troopers pulled up, dismounted, dropped rein. Army carbines were unshipped, and as more and more of Baldwin's and Doak's followers rushed from the saloons, where they had been celebrating their victor, the battle opened.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Gunfire in Benton*

OUTLAWS took cover behind buildings and awning posts, but they kept their horses with them. Bursts of gunfire sent citizens scurrying to safety. Along the hitch-racks stood skittish mustangs, the animals alarmed by the cracking volleys.

Though he outnumbered Carr two to one, Baldy Baldwin saw little point in conducting a battle in Fort Benton. As the bugle's notes sounded, the commandant at the fort was apprised of the presence of other troops. Soon his infantry would emerge and help sweep the streets.

Mounted outlaws, shooting back as they retreated north out of Fort Benton, galloped away from the settlement. Baldy Baldwin, Teton River Cal Doak, Mulehide Si Latham, and other figures recognized by Cody and Pryor could be seen as they marshalled the orderly withdrawal.

Carr's bugle called his troops to horse, then to mount. They pursued the enemy

[*Turn page*]

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through the town, then over the rolling prairies. But it was fruitless. Buffalo Bill, Mireles and the Rio Kid might overtake some of the outlaws but the cavalry horses were unequal to such a fast race.

"Baldwin and his gunhands can ride all the way to Canada if we persist," observed Buffalo Bill.

Soon Carr's bugles called a halt. For the Missouri River wolves had split into small bands and streaked off in as many directions.

Returning to Fort Benton, General Carr went to greet the commander of the small infantry garrison. The Rio Kid, Cody and Mireles ate and drank in the Royal Flush, then found a quiet spot where they might rest, for they had been on the go for many long hours. Carr's troopers, too, needed to make up for their interrupted night.

When the Rio Kid and his comrades emerged, it was late in the afternoon. But the long main street, from the river docks through the settlement, was clogged by heavy wagons drawn by oxen or mules. These were awaiting their turn to load supplies for the Western camps. Plenty of saloons and gambling parlors were doing a land-office business. Below the high clay banks of the Missouri, fast, shallow-draft sternwheelers could be seen. This trade spelled the town's chief reason for commercial existence.

General Carr's sentries were posted at strategic points, but there had been no sign of Baldwin's return.

The scouts re-entered the Royal Flush for a drink and another meal. Carr's aide, Captain Trevers, found them as they were throwing a few rounds of dice at a crowded table.

"The general would like to see you, gentlemen," he informed. "He's at the post."

They mounted their horses and followed Trevers to the fort. The American Fur Company had built the fort originally and traded here with the Indian trappers for years, then had closed its business and leased the fort to the army. There were blockhouses at diagonal corners so that defenders could sweep the four walls with gunfire. The walls were of adobe, of incredible thickness, for there was no stockade. Several rooflines broke the contour.

A larger gate and a small one faced the river. It had been the policy to admit Indians through the gates into the open patio. Here the savages could be covered by riflemen in the bastions and behind the adobe inner walls. The trader dealt with them through a small window, not permitting the Indians to enter the store itself.

MAJOR DREW WILSON, commandant at the fort, was a grizzled Civil War veteran. He knew Buffalo Bill and had heard of the Rio Kid. For a time they conferred. Wilson had but a skeleton force of infantry, most of them recruits.

"It's a cinch Baldy Baldwin and Teton River Doak won't come back to town long as you're here, General," said the Rio Kid.

Carr nodded. "I agree. I intend to pay a call on Lease Ward and see how Lieutenant Eggleston is coming along. Then I'll return to my duties downriver."

"S'pose the Rio Kid and I see can we guess where the Sioux are headed?" suggested Buffalo Bill. "They crossed the Missouri, we savvy that. Mebbe we can find out what their game is if we pick up their sign."

"Excellent," agreed Carr. "I'm sure Major Wilson will offer every possible facility here."

Wilson was friendly and eager to help. Within the settlement he might be of some assistance, but his unmounted men could not cope on the prairie with such a savage band of riders as Baldwin led.

With a small escort, General Carr rode to the LW that evening. The Rio Kid and Cody accompanied him. They covered the last miles in the darkness, for the scouts did not wish possible spies to see them visiting Ward's. Doak and Baldwin would wreak a horrible revenge on those who dared offer aid and comfort to Carr and Buffalo Bill.

Ward greeted them with the bluff Texas heartiness. Eggleston was still in serious condition, weak as a kitten, but still alive.

"Carolyn and the wife have been nursin' him night and day, sir," Lease Ward informed the general. "If he pulls through you can thank the ladies."

"I'm sure he's in the best of hands," agreed Carr.

He tiptoed to the open door of the bedroom and looked in, but Eggleston was sleeping. Carolyn Ward sat beside the

lieutenant. His face seemed drained of blood, whiter than ever, thought the Rio Kid as he peeked over the general's shoulder. They withdrew from the sick room then.

After a warm repast and a visit, the party left the ranch and rode back to Fort Benton. They slept a few hours, and after the morning meal General Carr led his cavalrymen back on the river road.

Buffalo Bill Cody, the Rio Kid and Celestino Mireles turned upstream on the wagon highway until they reached a ford. Crossing to the south bank, they began hunting sign. The scouts soon cut the trail of unshod, ridden mustangs and followed for several miles toward a mountain range rising to the southeast.

By afternoon they were in the wooded hills and had picked up more traces of Sioux and Cheyennes. At dark they were convinced the savages were making a long run back to some rendezvous from whence they had come.

"Baldwin sent 'em word they could pick up the guns at Benton," declared the Rio Kid. "I believe they're returning to their favorite stamping grounds on the Bighorn and Rosebud."

"Me, too," agreed Buffalo Bill. They were resting their horses, squatting in a sheltered draw as they talked it over. Mireles was on guard nearby. "There's going to be a big battle. Carr thinks so, too. Crook, Custer, Terry and Gibbon are all boring in for it. Those guns will make a difference."

An owl hooted and soon another answered, farther off. They stayed silent and motionless for it could be Indian scouts signaling. The Sioux would have braves guarding the back trail.

"Let's get out of here," whispered the Rio Kid.

They led away the horses, made a wide detour of the owlhooting area and rode on into the dangerous wilds. Red death lurked before them.

LIEUTENANT HARVEY EGGLESTON watched Carolyn Ward as she straightened his covers and tidied up the sick room. He had been aware of her, of her mother and of Lease Ward, and had talked with them, but this was the first time his head really seemed clear.

Five days had elapsed since he had been cut down in Fort Benton as he had tried fruitlessly to pull Sergeant Al Tate out of danger. He knew that Tate was dead. They had told him so. From the battle on he had only vague memories, distorted by the agony he had suffered, His side was stiff from the wound and it hurt whenever he moved. He had been so weak he could not lift his arms, but this morning, with the bright sun streaming in at the window, a feeling of optimism and comfort had stolen over him.

"I think I'll live," he said aloud, as though he had just reached this decision.

Carolyn turned and looked at him in surprise. Then her lips broke into a warm smile.

"Of course you will! You're fine now, Lieutenant Eggleston. Would you like a drink?"

"Thank you, I would."

It was not long since he had had one, but when she gave him a cup she would sit on the side of the cot, gently cradle his head in a soft arm so the liquid would not spill on him. She poured water from a pitcher into a tincup and went through the routine.

Eggleston took his time about swallowing it. It was very pleasant to have her so close and he looked up into her long-lashed eyes. They were a sage color and wide-set. He could see small freckles on her rounded cheek and stray wisps of strawberry-hued hair had escaped from the blue ribbon binding her trim head. Her body was slender yet feminine and her features fine. Carolyn was the loveliest girl he had ever had the good fortune to meet, decided the lieutenant.

He found she was returning his gaze and realized he had caught a most affectionate, unguarded expression in her eyes, for she flushed a little, straightened up and looked prim, dropping her lashes.

"I'll bring you your lunch in a few minutes, Lieutenant," she said in a low voice.

"Please don't go yet. I'd like to talk to you."

She sat down in the chair but she would not catch his gaze for a moment. She seemed to have put herself on guard.

"Have you heard anything from General Carr and Buffalo Bill Cody?" he inquired, as she waited.

"A scout called the Rio Kid brought you here," she explained. "A friend of Buffalo Bill's. We told you that, but per-

haps you've forgotten. You were very sick. Then General Carr and the scouts came to see you, but you were asleep and so weak we wouldn't disturb you."

"Do you know what happened?" he questioned. "That is, about the guns the outlaws meant to sell the Indians?"

She told the story to him as she had understood it—how they had shaken off the enemy that terrible night after the fight at the warehouse, how Bob Pryor had brought Eggleston to the ranch. She had learned from them, when Carr had made his call, that they had failed to seize the great store of weapons and ammunition. Cody and the Rio Kid were away but would return shortly. General Carr had ridden off down the Missouri.

Her voice was pleasant and stirred him. When she brought him lunch he feigned he was still too weak to feed himself and she served him, but no longer treated him as she might have a hurt child. She seemed almost fearful of him now.

Mrs. Ward watched him during the afternoon. She was bustling and smiling, most pleasant with him. Lease Ward, hearing that the young soldier was on the mend and able to talk, came in late in the day, plunked himself down and chatted for a time in his breezy way.

"You're welcome as the flowers in May, Lieutenant," boomed Ward. "We're mighty happy to have you with us. I'll tell the girls to serve you a barbecued steak for your supper. That's what a man needs, real meat. You'll soon be rarin' to go."

That night the lieutenant slept very soundly, without the usual nightmares which had disturbed him. In the morning he felt so much stronger that he moved to the edge of the bed and put his feet to the door. Pushing up with his hands, he tried to stand up. Needles and pins prickled the soles of his feet, his head swam and he nearly collapsed.

Carolyn appeared at the door and was horrified. She hurried to his side and gripped his arm to steady him, making him return to his bed. Then she went and told her mother.

NEXT ISSUE'S NOVEL

RED TRAIL OF NO RETURN

By JOSEPH CHADWICK

FEATURING BOB PRYOR

## CHAPTER VII

*Baldy's Claim*

MRS. WARD came in with a breakfast tray for him. "Perhaps you can get up for a little while this afternoon if you feel strong enough, Lieutenant. You could sit in the chair by the window."

"Thank you, ma'am. I'm much better. And I wish I could tell you how grateful I am to you."

She patted his hand. "Where do your parents live?" she asked, sitting down to help him eat, after she had propped him up a bit with a pillow.

"In Hartford, Connecticut, Mrs. Ward. They'll be most eager to thank you for all you've done for me."

"Oh, I know how a mother feels!"

"I wish I could write to them. Is there any way to post a letter from this place?"

"Yes, one of the cowboys will be going to Fort Benton for supplies in a day or two. He'll carry it there for you and then it can go downriver on a steamboat. I'll fetch you paper and quill right after dinner and you can tell us what to write, if you wish. Carolyn's hand is very beautiful."

"Yes, it is." He realized she meant the girl's handwriting.

Later, Carolyn came in with writing paper, a bottle of homemade ink and a couple of quill pens. She held a book in her lap and rested the paper on it as she took down his words in a flowing script, each letter carefully done and rounded.

"Dear Mother & Father," he dictated. "I am well and especially happy. Just now I am staying at the ranch of most hospitable and charming people, the Wards, not far from Fort Benton, Montana. A young lady, Miss Carolyn Ward, is writing this for me as I hurt my hand and it is bound up, though my wound is not serious and I soon expect to be back on duty with General Carr. You must not worry as I am in fine spirits and condition. All my love to both. Your obedient son, Harvey."

When she had sealed it and addressed

it as he directed, she looked at him seriously.

"You're different," she said. "You're very thoughtful of others, aren't you?"

He felt embarrassed at the praise, shaking his head. "I don't want to alarm them. By the time they receive the letter I'll be back in the saddle, you know."

"Yes, I suppose you will." She glanced away and seemed to withdraw into herself.

"I wish you'd tell me about yourself," Eggleston said. "That is, about your Texas home and why you came here."

"I'll agree if you'll tell me about Hartford and your people afterward," she said, smiling.

They made the bargain.

"We lived near San Antonio," she explained. "It was warmer, life was much easier. Except that Father didn't like it after the war. I was too young to let it bother me much. Dad's always been adventurous. He hates to be crowded. So we packed our belongings in covered wagons, gathered our herds and started for Montana. I could ride inside or on a seat whenever I wished, but I walked some and stayed in the saddle a lot of the time. We had to winter in Salt Lake City. That's the way we came through. We saw the Mormons."

She pursed her red lips. "I heard Brigham Young make a speech. In the spring we drove through the passes and along the Missouri trail. They call Montana 'The Land of Shining Mountains,' and it is very pretty and not too bad, but the winter is terribly long and cold in these parts."

In turn he told her of his faraway home in the settled East, of West Point and his brief service on the Frontier. He had been too young to fight in the Civil War.

Buddy Ward, Carolyn's young brother, slouched in then. He had now and then come to stare at the invalid. Buddy was red-headed and heavily freckled. He had an infectious grin and was brimming over with energy. He had been out hunting and his clothing was stained and torn, his boots caked with mud.

"Howdy, Lieutenant. You feeling better?"

"Much better, Buddy," Eggleston said.

BUDDY hung around for a time and the conversation languished. The boy began to tell Eggleston about a bear he was tracking. It was the largest one in Montana, according to Buddy, and a man-killer. The bear had slain several calves and Buddy's father had promised him five dollars for its hide.

Carolyn tossed her head impatiently and, rising, went out of the bedroom. Buddy drew his chair closer.

"Now we can talk," he said. "Women get excited too easy, don't they, Lieutenant? Do you like Sis? She likes you. I heard her tell Mom she thinks yuh're the finest, best-lookin' critter she ever met up with! But watch out for Long Lew Grimes, savvy?"

"Who's that?" inquired Eggleston, keeping a solemn face.

"He punches cows for Joe Haskins of the Square H, that's up the creek a piece. Long Lew's from Texas and has a mighty quick temper. He packs two Colts. The other fellers are scared of him because he can lick 'em with one hand tied behind his back. He's been sparkin' Sis all year and he was around here day before yesterday, but she told him to sashay. Said she was busy, but that was a lie."

"Buddy!" a choked voice said. "Mother wants you immediately!"

Carolyn had returned and stood in the doorway. Her cheeks were crimson. Eggleston concluded she must have heard at least part of Buddy's confidential talk. She trailed the boy down the hall and Eggleston caught angry whispers. Then Buddy said in a loud, aggrieved tone, "Aw, I didn't tell him anything."

Later, Mrs. Ward and Carolyn helped him to a chair by the window, where he sat with a blanket over his legs. The sunshine streamed in and it was very pleasant.

Lease Ward brought in a visitor, a tall, dark-haired man in tough leather and a big gray Stetson, his powerful legs thrust into spurred cowboots. Black, wiry stubble showed on his bronzed, lean face. His grim mouth was straight, his eyes seamed at the corners. He was a few years younger than Ward.

"Meet Joe Haskins of the Square H, Lieutenant," said Ward. "He's my neighbor. His spread lies up this river past Split Mountain."

Haskins shook hands and grunted a greeting. Ward passed around a bottle, the ranchers sitting on the edge of the bed. They spoke of cattle and the price of

beef, of other range problems.

"I've lost a passel of calves and grown stock, too," declared Haskins. "It ain't wolves, at least not animal ones, and it ain't that almighty bear Buddy's always talkin' about, either. It's Cal Doak and his bunch."

"No doubt of that," growled Lease Ward. "One of these days we'll have to get together and clean off this range, Joe. They're all-fired bold and getting nervier every jump."

Ranch life in Montana was rough and ready. Indians, rustlers, cold and snow had to be fought. It took men of extraordinary strength and will to contend with the problems. Ward was one and so was Joe Haskins. Hardy souls found excitement and satisfaction in this type of existence, while the weaker left the country or died.

A man came to the open window and looked through. He was one of the largest young fellows Eggleston had ever seen, a giant in leather chaps and vest, enormous sombrero on his head. His curly hair was a tow color, his eyes a pale-blue. He had a lugubrious expression on his rugged, square face, and while he addressed himself to Haskins he stared sourly at Eggleston. Two large revolvers rode at his sturdy hips.

"Boss, you want I should run back those four mustangs?" he inquired, filling the window as he leaned on the sill.

"That's right, I been holding them for you, Joe," informed Ward. "They're in the side pen."

"No hurry. We'll pick 'em up some time," said Haskins. "But Lew, you better look at that left rear shoe on my horse. I believe there's a nail gone."

Nodding, and with a final scowl at Eggleston, the waddy slouched off.

"Is that Long Lew Grimes?" asked the lieutenant.

"Yeah, that's him," answered Haskins. The rancher seemed rather surprised that Eggleston should know the cowboy's full name. "Best hand I got. Sort of quick on the trigger with his temper, but Lew's all wool and a yard wide."

"Two yards, most," grinned Lease Ward, taking another swig and passing the bottle to Haskins. "He's the biggest coyote east of the Rockies."

JOE HASKINS rode away before supper, "Long Lew" and another Square H man with him. Mrs. Ward brought in a tray to Eggleston, who was back in bed. His appeite had picked up and he cleaned up the generous serving.

Again he slept like a baby and in the morning there was no holding him down. He began walking around the room, unsteady at first, but soon gaining strength. The wound hurt but had healed. Eggleston was well along the road to recovery, thanks to the skillful care he had received.

His chair was carried into the side yard and he sat there in the afternoon, enjoying the warm, scented breeze from the hills. Ward and three of his men came in and began working with some mustangs in a nearby corral. Eggleston loved horses and watched with interest as they handled the half-wild creatures. Buddy was mending an old saddle, sitting in the shade behind the barn.

Carolyn came from the kitchen and smiled down at him. He looked up at her and then caught her hand.

"You're beautiful," he told her.

The girl began to tremble. "Please don't talk that way," she begged. "You can't mean it. You're an officer. You know about everything and I don't. I only went to school a few years in Texas."

She tried to take back her hand but he wouldn't let her go. Suddenly he realized she must be thinking she wasn't good enough for him.

"Carolyn, look at me! You're much finer than I am. A woman such as you is worth everything!"

She began to cry but sought to hide the tears by turning away. Then she gave a low exclamation, and Eggleston looked past the corrals to see a dozen riders approaching the ranch from the creek.

Lease Ward and his waddies had already sighted the visitors and had left the pen. They came and stood with back to the house wall. Ward glanced at Eggleston, frowned, then shrugged. The oncoming bandits must have seen him before in Fort Benton.

Buddy had stationed himself at a window in the barn and the barrel of his carbine rested on the sill, commanding the yard.

"That's Baldwin, the gunrunner!" said Eggleston. He had run into the man, fought him. "I oughtn't to be out here. He'll recognize me and guess

what's happened, Carolyn."

He was distressed, for it could mean terrible trouble for the Wards.

"Keep still," she ordered.

Baldy Baldwin also was at the ready. With the air of a fighting dog sizing up another before tangling, the rangy leader slowly came up, stopped his black gelding and confronted Ward. He was heavily armed and so were the bearded toughs behind him.

Baldwin's black Stetson was crammed down on his elongated skull. In the bright light his hide looked fever-yellow, his turkey craw wrapped with a stock. He had on a black coat and gray trousers, fine boots.

"Well, howdy, Ward," he drawled. "Mighty warm, ain't it?"

He swept off the hat and his entirely bald head gleamed smooth as an egg. He mopped it with a red bandanna, stuffed the handkerchief into a pocket and stroked his pate several times with a large, bony hand. His catlike eyes were green and when he gave a humorless grin, buck teeth were exposed.

"What do you want, Baldy?" demanded Ward gruffly.

"Ain't you goin' to ask me to light and set?" grinned Baldy Baldwin.

"You're not welcome here, Baldy. Nor is your pard, Cal Doak. You can tell him that from me, when you see him."

Eggleston listened, watching the scene. Doak was not on deck, but Mulehide Si Latham was with his evil master. Latham's straw hair and brows were bleached. He was scowling. A blacksnake whip was coiled at his wide belt, hanging over his horse's ribs. He glanced at Eggleston, nudged Baldy and whispered something to him.

Baldwin flicked his dangerous eyes to the lieutenant, then back to Ward.

He cocked a bony leg over his saddle-horn.

"All right, we'll talk from here, Ward. But I must say you're not too polite to the man who owns the range you're squattin' on."

"What are you talking about, Baldy?" cried Lease Ward. "I filed on these river sections two years ago! They're mine!"

"You filed but you did it wrong. *I* did it right. Now they belong to me!"

"That's a fact, Ward," chimed in Latham. "Mister Baldwin is the rightful owner of this land."

"You both lie," snapped Ward. "Go on, get out of here, the whole passel of you!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Attack*

THERE was tension in the air. Eggleston wished he had his revolver with him, but it was back in the bedroom. Baldwin's big teeth still showed but he was angry at Ward. His long head went up and down like a turkey's. Anyone in the yard would draw and fire at the slightest break of tension.

Baldy, perhaps, was not prepared to go to such lengths, for he was in the open, up front and a clear target. Buddy could hit him from the barn window, and certainly Lease Ward would aim at his chief enemy, even if he died in the act.

"Why don't yuh listen to reason, Ward?" said Baldy, after a short silence during which none of the tensed men moved. "I got papers here provin' what I say. Joe Haskins is in the same boat. You failed to fill out the right documents to cinch ownership. I'm willing to give you time to shift. Plenty of land up north on the Upper Marias."

"I'm staying here," replied Ward coldly. He had regained control of himself. His men sided him, on full guard.

Baldwin's bare head shone in the sunlight. His hat hung by its strap from the saddle-horn. He caressed his pate again and licked his lips.

"Take a peek at this," he told Ward.

He pulled folded papers from his pocket and shook them out, holding them so Ward could reach them. The rancher shook his head. "Yuh're no sheriff," he mocked. "Not by a danged sight, Baldy. You'll have to go to court, and where will you stand then? Everybody savvies you're a thief and a killer. I'll show you up!"

Baldy was angered. What Lease Ward said was true. He would have a long, difficult struggle, legally, if he sought to dispossess decent ranchers such as Haskins and Ward, even if what he said was true about technical errors in the cow-

men's titles. He frowned and shoved the papers back in his pocket. "Well, I done my best for you, Ward. Don't say I didn't. I've given you fair warning. Be out of here inside of forty-eight hours or I'll take steps to put you off! It's plain you're my enemy. I see you're harboring a feller who tried to kill me in Fort Benton. That won't help you any, not with yours truly!"

He bobbed his head toward Eggleston. Ward was silent, watchful. A faint smile touched the Texan's strong mouth.

Baldy Baldwin jammed his hat down to his ears and stuck his long feet in the stirrups, but did not show any other signs of leaving. He railed and threatened in a loud, angry voice.

"You're just as long as a snake and drag the ground when you walk, Ward! You'll get yours! Buffalo Bill Cody and the Rio Kid are in cahoots with you, that's a cinch. Don't try to lie out of it. They fetched that tin soldier scout here. You'll pay the piper for it."

"Run along, you talk too much," growled Ward.

Mrs. Ward sang out warningly from the kitchen. "Lease! There's a score of toughs coming this way, from the opposite side of the house."

Ward swore. "Get inside, the whole passel of you," he bellowed.

Baldwin had pulled rein, whirled the black so he was in among his followers. Mulehide and the rest covered him and they hastily retreated. Baldy's idea had become plain to Lease Ward. The gunrunner had hoped to hold him down while another contingent sneaked up from the other direction.

Ward threw a hasty shot at Baldwin's crew, who were raising their guns. The rancher rushed around the rear of the building and bullets narrowly missed him, kicking up spurts of dust around him and slashing the wall. A cowboy threw up his hand and sagged. Buddy's carbine crackled from the barn window and one of Baldy's followers screeched and dropped his business arm.

"Hurry!" cried Carolyn, tugging at Eggleston's shoulder.

He rose and she put an arm about him to steady him. There was an open side door close by. Something sang through the warm air and cut a chunk of adobe from the building. Then they were inside, out of immediate danger.

Gunfire rattled on the far side of the ranch house. Ward was over there with a cowboy, shooting it out. But soon they were forced to hunt cover, for Baldy Baldwin turned his men and they came tearing back, pouring bullets at the openings in the house.

Eggleston and the girl paused in the living room. "Give me a rifle, Carolyn," he begged. "I can sit here and help hold them off."

She hesitated. Then she said, "All right. But be sure you stay down so they can't hit you."

CAROLYN brought him a loaded weapon from the rack and he sat by a narrow window, firing at an angle. The targets were moving and zig-zagging, but he was an expert marksman and so were Ward and the cowboys.

A couple of mustangs crashed, one rider pinned under his horse and yelling in pain, the other rolling over and over, then getting to his feet and limping away, hands clasped behind his head as though he hoped they would stop bullets.

Lead thudded in, striking the walls or shrieking through the house. But the metal slung at the horsemen forced them to swerve and drive on. Ward, Buddy, Eggleston and the waddies wasted no time. They peppered away as fast as they could pull trigger. In such light the attackers could be picked off, especially if they slowed and dismounted close to the structure.

After a few whirls back and forth, Indian fashion, Baldwin drew off, his band with him. The shooting died off on the other side and the killers sat their saddles, staring at the ranch. In this lull, Buddy Ward ran from the barn and scooted to the kitchen, where his mother held the door open for him. He had done well in the battle, his crossfire helping drive away the foe.

Lease Ward hurried through the house, checking up. The rancher nodded to the soldier.

"Gave 'em better than they sent. Obliged for the hand, Lieutenant. I saw some of your hits. You shoot like a master."

Eggleston stood up. The excitement made him forget he was unsteady on his legs. He reeled but Ward caught his arm.

"How many are there on the other flank, sir?" he asked.

"Oh, twenty-five or thirty. And more coming up. It's Teton River Cal Doak and his bunch of rustlers."

Ward helped him across the wide room. Peeking from a window, at an angle so he would not draw fire, Eggleston saw the Missouri River wolves out there, drawn up in rough battle line. One of them, pointed out by the rancher, was the formidable Doak. A flat hat crowned his dark head and he wore leather pants and a stained gray shirt, crossed bandoliers riding his massive shoulders. Eggleston could see the fierce face, with mashed nose and sunken, shadowed eyes. The outlaws were of like stamp, all well-armed and ready to kill at the drop of a hat.

"I'm sorry about this, Mister Ward," said Eggleston as he resumed his seat. "I hope it isn't because I'm here that you've been attacked. From what he said, he must guess I came with Cody and the Rio Kid."

"Forget it," said Ward. "If that's the reason, which I don't believe, I'm glad you're with us. However, the way Baldy behaved when he spotted you, I'm inclined to think he didn't savvy you were with me till he come today."

"Why do you suppose he's after your property?"

Lease Ward shrugged. "It would make a fine depot for Baldy and his pards to operate from."

"But he mentioned Joe Haskins, as though he aimed to run him off, too."

"Well, he couldn't leave the Square H at his rear, I s'pose."

"What will you do now?" Eggleston questioned.

"Sit tight for the time being," Ward answered. "Three of my men are still out. They'll come home before dark, and when they spot Doak and Baldwin they'll go for help."

Where the cowboys would apply for such assistance as was needed, Eggleston did not inquire. Joe Haskins had even less fighters at the Square H than Lease Ward had at the LW. Such a handful could not break through the ring which had been drawn around the ranch by the bandits, not with any hope of smashing them.

As for Fort Benton, while Ward's messengers might reach the settlement it was a question as to whether enough citizens could be roused to action. Baldy Baldwin and Cal Doak had an evil reputation. It was known they would kill any man who opposed them, that they had real power. The shifting population of the river town would think twice before they would brace the outlaws on the side of some luckless cowman they had not even met.

The commandant at the fort might possibly mount his infantrymen and sally forth. But Baldwin, in that case, could either drive off the soldiers, since he outnumbered them, or retire to the wilds as he had done when General Carr had charged him, returning to wreak vengeance when the troops departed.

Teton River Cal Doak rode a half circle to meet Baldy Baldwin and the two leaders conferred. Now and then one would point at the ranchhouse. They rolled quirlies and lighted them, the sun reflecting on a bottle they passed back and forth.

"They're waiting for dark," remarked Lease Ward grimly. Then they'll try to creep in and overpower us."

IT WAS against this expected attack that Ward now began making his preparations. Everybody helped, including the women and Buddy, while Eggleston acted as guard, keeping an eye on the enemy.

Furniture was braced against doors and slats nailed over the lower window sections. Ammunition was broken out, buckets of water filled from a well which had been dug close to the kitchen. The well was enclosed by adobe walls and connected by a narrow passage with the building, so that water could be drawn without the inhabitants exposing themselves to outside fire. It was a precaution many pioneers took throughout Indian country.

Dried meats, canned goods, pemmican, flour and salt, sugar and coffee, other supplies, were stored in the pantry. They could hold out for some time, unless overwhelmed by direct charges.

The women would load guns and bandage the injured. Carolyn and Mrs. Ward had another patient now, the waddy who had been clipped in the yard. His wound was not serious but he had to rest up.

The sun was sinking behind the shining mountains. In the last hour of light a meal was served, and the men snatched naps in order to be fresh for the battle they were certain would develop. As

darkness fell over the ranch, the world seemed hushed and a tense expectation held all hearts.

Eggleston, seeking to pierce the gathering gloom, heard the far-off, mournful howl of a wolf.

* * * * *

On the road between Fort Benton and the LW, the Rio Kid, Buffalo Bill Cody and Celestino Mireles trotted their horses at an easy pace. Night was falling over the vast wilderness. The three scouts had pierced far to the southeast on the trail of the warlike Sioux and Cheyennes.

They had spied upon Gall and Crazy Horse, overheard some of Sitting Bull's harangues as the medicine man called for all-out war against the whites. They had seen many of the new guns which Baldwin had sold to the savages. They had had several narrow escapes from death.

They had embodied what information they had gleaned in a report and entrusted it to the captain of a steamer about to leave Fort Benton.

The message would be delivered to General Carr.

"I hope Eggleston's perked up, Rio Kid," remarked Buffalo Bill.

"By this time he should be rarin' to go," replied Bob Pryor. "Maybe he can ride back with us."

Celestino ranged in advance of the two. The country was rolling, with thick grass, broken here and there by clay banks, patches of rocks, brush and spruce.

A cool wind blew in their faces.

"Hear that?" asked the Rio Kid suddenly.

"Sounds like mighty heavy firing," grunted Cody. "And it's from the direction of the LW."

The Mexican had turned and came loping back, hissing a warning.

"Hombres coming in a hurry, General!"

They drew off the trail. A lopsided moon was rising.

Around a curve in the trail came two horsemen.

"Come on, Dinny," one called to his companion. "Don't slow down. Can't you hear that shootin'? They're attacking!"

"I'm doing the best this mule-eared cayuse can," answered the other.

"Dinny!" sang out the Rio Kid. He had recognized their voices, knew they were cowboys from Ward's spread.

Dinny pulled his rein, his spirited mustang dancing sideways to a halt, both man and beast startled at the hail. Frankie, the second LW man, pulled up behind his friend.

"Who is it?" demanded Dinny.

"The Rio Kid and Buffalo Bill. Where are you bound in such a rush?"

"Baldy Baldwin and Cal Doak have hit the ranch with a passel of gunslingers," explained Dinny. "Me and Frankie and Sing Ince were out when they showed up, and couldn't get home. Finally we decided to head for Benton and fetch help. There's too many of the cusses to call on Joe Haskins. They'd wipe out the Square H in the open."

"How many?" asked Pryor.

"Oh, sixty, seventy, and I reckon more comin' up."

"Where's Ince?"

"Hid near the ranch, so he can watch what goes on and tell us when we get back."

"What do yuh say, Billy?" inquired the Rio Kid.

Buffalo Bill shrugged. "I say if you can muster enough decent hombres in Benton in a case like this, then I don't savvy that den of iniquity. I've seen men shot down in broad daylight and all folks do is duck lead and step over the bodies. Miners and such are just passing through, while those who stick in the town to get their money are all-fired afraid of Baldy and Doak. Why should they get themselves killed for Ward's sake? The outlaws will go after anybody who dares lift a finger against them."

"How about Major Wilson at the fort?" Pryor suggested.

"He'll do what he can, if we ask him. But he hasn't got many soldiers, and infantry at that. Doak and Baldy can ride circles around them."

"Tell you what, Dinny," decided the Rio Kid. "You keep going and see what can be done in Fort Benton. Be sure to tell the major that Cody and I sent you. Frankie can stick with us and we'll pick up Ince. That will make five of us and maybe we can sting those wolves enough to make it count."

"That's the ticket!" nodded Buffalo Bill.

## CHAPTER IX

*Life and Death*

DINNY hurried on while the four made tracks for the LW. The heavy reports of rifle volleys grew louder as they neared the ranch. Frankie knew where "Sing" Ince was concealed —on the near side of the creek. He led them to the spot and they held a whispered conference. They could see the flashes of exploding guns up the west slope and crashing gunfire rolled over the range.

"A bunch of them are using Sharps," said Cody.

The weapons, used to kill buffalo and other big game, threw a heavy slug and had great penetrating power.

"I say we ride in and tickle their backs," voted the Rio Kid. "It may slow them some, boys."

All agreed. Weapons checked and loaded, they made their plan. They would keep within a few yards of one another as they charged.

"If anybody gets lost, we'll meet at Split Mountain in the morning," ordered Bob Pryor. "Let's get going."

The quintet mounted and splashed across the little river, climbing the other bank. They were below the ranch, looming black against the moonlight. Now and then they sighted a figure, one of Baldy's or Doak's gunmen. The attackers were on foot, creeping close to the house walls in the shadows. Some had located themselves in the barn and bunkhouse, shooting from the openings.

A thin but steady defense held. From loopholes and the lower window corners Lease Ward and the few in the house strove to clear the foe from the immediate area. A hoarse shout now and then could be heard.

The Rio Kid picked up speed, the swift Saber flashing in. The five who sought to help Ward were in danger of being hit by bullets from their friends, but they did not approach too closely and they were moving at full gallop, zigzagging and swerving.

Pryor was aware of his comrades'

[*Turn page*]


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shots and shrill cries. They made all the noise they could in the hope of fooling Baldwin. The enemy might believe there were more of them if they raised enough din.

He emptied his carbine into the black forms lying on the dirt outside the adobe walls. He aimed low so there would be no chance of his fire hitting anyone inside. Yelps and angry calls rose as Buffalo Bill, Mireles and the LW waddies also poured in lead.

"What in tarnation blazes is going on over here?"

That bull voice belonged to Teton River Cal Doak. The giant rustler came thundering around the building. Confused replies from his startled men did not enlighten him, but he sighted the Rio Kid's figure, nearest him.

"Hey, you all-fired fool!" he cried out. "Hold fire and reach, or we'll sieve you! You from the Square H?"

Doak jumped to the natural conclusion that Ward's neighbors must have arrived to help the LW.

Just as the Rio Kid swung his gun and tried for him, Doak's oversized horse slewed around and Doak rolled out of the saddle and hit the dirt. But he could not have been badly hurt, for he immediately began shouting commands.

"Rise up, boys! It's the Square H, but only a handful. Charge 'em, give 'em all you got!"

A number of the attackers jumped to their feet and scuttled back, shooting as they came.

The Rio Kid and his men were outlined against the sky. Blasts of lead sent the quintet galloping off in retreat. They were brave but too few to cope with such a powerful army of desperadoes as Baldwin bossed. They rode close together to confer at a safe distance as they reloaded.

"What next, Rio Kid?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"We'll gadfly the cusses as long as we can," said Pryor grimly. "Mebbe we can prevent them from smashing into Ward's house."

The horses were given a breather, then made a wide circle and charged in from another angle. This time Baldy Baldwin could be heard shouting at his boys. And Baldwin was ready for them. He had mounted a dozen killers and they dug in their spurs, hoarse challenges in their bearded throats as they rushed the Rio Kid and his comrades.

Hot slugs narrowly missed drilling Bob Pryor. His friends were split up, lost in the darkness. Shooting came from other directions and Pryor decided the flashes and reports marked a running scrap as more bandits tried to run down Buffalo Bill and the others. Volleys also crackled at the LW as Baldwin and Doak resumed the offensive there.

At last he shook off his immediate pursuers, describing a wide circle which brought him back to a point not far from Wards'. The battle still raged. Once more he joined in, alone for a time, until three more single engagements began at various points. He thought these must be Cody and a couple of the boys, wondered if one might have been wounded or killed, unable to return.

BATTERED and weary from the long fight, the Rio Kid drew off northwest from the LW as the first touch of dawn stained the sky. His ammunition was low, he had thrown most of it at Baldy Baldwin's pack as they sought to invade Lease Ward's ranch house. In the coming light, he could not hope to get close enough to do any damage, and Saber needed a breather, a drink.

The day had not yet come and shapes were still vague. The low-roofed ranchhouse hulked in the drifting mists off the creek and the damp meadows. Cattle were bawling and the renegades under Doak and Baldwin were still shooting.

Pryor looked around, hoping to see Cody, Mireles, and the two LW cowboys who had been with him during the first part of the fight. But there was no sign of them.

He rode slowly up a long slant and dropped from his sweated hull in a patch of trees on the west rise. Even as he watched the light increased, so he could make out objects at a distance, though in the bottoms it was still misty.

Below him lay the LW and the winding river. Southeastward ran the trail to Fort Benton, but it was hidden for the most part by the rolling contours of hills and stands of woods. This country was vast, scarcely touched by the white men who had come to invade the Indians' last great stronghold.

The LW was still holding out. Now

and again a rifle would crack from a loophole as a defender tried to pick off an outlaw. But in the dawn the Missouri River killers had drawn back, unable to lie in as close as they could at night. The fight had certainly slacked off.

The Rio Kid saw a couple of horsemen splash across the creek and approach a knot of the bandits. Among the group towered Teton River Cal Doak, the bony figure of Baldy Baldwin alongside that of his evil partner.

Baldwin and Doak mounted their horses after the pair of riders reached them. Baldwin waved a long arm. The armed band trotted to their mustangs, held back out of danger, jumped to saddle and followed their chiefs. Baldwin and Doak led the way up the west bank of the river, passing on the trail a quarter mile below Pryor's position. The toughs had a hard-bitten look to them. The Rio Kid had seen plenty of guerilla fighters in his time.

These men were of the same stamp, cold of heart, quick of temper and with no pity at all in them. The death of a victim meant nothing to such hands. Liquor and loot, skill with weapons and horse, these made up the world for Baldwin's crew. Pryor watched them jog past. They looked tired but they had plenty of brutal fight left in them.

Perhaps the Rio Kid and his partners had thrown in enough weight to prevent Baldwin from smashing into Ward's. But Baldy was not defeated by any means. He could besiege the ranch, pin those down within until they had expended their ammunition. He could try fire, explosives. But he was leaving, and no observers or sharpshooters remained around the LW.

Somewhat surprised at this tame abandonment of a favorable position, the Rio Kid stared after the bandits as they disappeared behind the natural barriers upriver.

Soon he had the answer. The mists were dispelling and riders appeared on the Fort Benton trail, headed for the ranch. One of them was the cowboy Dinny, who had carried the call for help to the fort, begging aid for Lease Ward. With Dinny were two buckskin-clad fellows whom Pryor did not recognize. Probably they were hunters and Plainsmen who had accompanied Dinny for the sport, dangerous as it might be, of battling the outlaws. They might be friends of the cowboy.

Dinny and his companions reached the creek and crossed. About this time, the Rio Kid sighted several blue-clad figures. In the van rode Major Drew Wilson, the grizzled commandant of the army post on the Missouri.

Moving toward his grazing horse, the Rio Kid mounted and headed slowly down to the LW. Lease Ward and others had come out to greet Major Wilson, cheered at the rescue.

The major had only a score of soldiers with him. They were poorly mounted, none really expert riders, for they were infantry and most of them were recruits. They carried pistols and single-shot carbines, and would be no match for Baldy Baldwin if the bandit chief wished to make a determined stand.

But this was not Baldwin's way. He preferred to side-step troops, raid in and out when the coast was clear, and in this his strategy was most sound.

LEASE WARD'S face and hands were streaked with powder stains and his strong eyes were darkly circled. Under his bronze showed a gray hue of weariness and long strain, for they had been fighting all night. But the rancher was grinning as he thanked Major Wilson for his aid.

"They had watchers on the road and seen you coming. I'm mighty obliged."

Bob Pryor saluted, reported to the officer, whose stragglers had come up, one with a lame horse.

"How far ahead are they?" asked Wilson.

"A mile, sir," replied the Rio Kid. "They're headed north. The Square H lies that way, doesn't it, Mister Ward?"

"That's right. I hope they don't go for Joe Haskins. His place ain't built to stand it like mine is," said Ward frowning. "Maybe we ought to start for there."

"I figure so," nodded the Rio Kid. "Major, I'll go on ahead and scout the way. Buffalo Bill and my friends ought to be along the line somewhere."

He waved to Lieutenant Eggleston, who was sitting in a window, Carolyn beside him. Buddy Ward was staring curiously at the soldiers. LW waddies were fraternizing with the newcomers, offering drinks and plugs of tobacco.

The Rio Kid swung off. Wilson was giving his men and horses a brief rest.

Passing Split Mountain, on the other side of which lay the Square H, Pryor glanced up at the wooded slopes toward the spot where he knew the rill ran. A lean figure showed, waved to him. It was Mireles. The Rio Kid gestured toward his objective, and before long Buffalo Bill Cody, the Mexican and Frankie soon joined him.

"Where's Ince?" inquired the Rio Kid.

"He's all right," answered Cody. "Got a flesh wound in one leg and his horse went down. We toted him up to the woods and hid him. We were waiting for you."

"I savvy. Well, you must have seen Baldwin go by. Major Wilson pulled in and Baldy pulled out."

Celestino was vastly relieved to see his trail *compadre*, the Rio Kid. His white teeth gleamed in his dark face as he smiled happily.

The quartet moved upriver, around the mountain spur which narrowed the trail between it and the stream. Past the barrier, they saw rolling range spreading out before them, with few places of concealment save for the uneven lines of brush marking the creek bed. Ahead, smoke stained the sky, while a touch of pink colored the eastern horizon. Suddenly they heard a heavy burst of gunfire up there.

The Rio Kid and Buffalo Bill trotted their horses ahead. They could see the fresh sign left by the passage of Baldwin's riders, who had made no attempt to hide their sign. The little river curved and the wooden buildings of Joe Haskins' spread came into sight. They saw Baldwin and Doak then, the main band of raiders circling the place and firing at the ranchhouse.

A bullet shrieked within a yard of Pryor's head. Another missed Cody by the same margin. The shots came from several of the outlaws who were lying back on the trail, perhaps watching for pursuit. The four hastily threw up their carbines and replied, and the bandits slowly moved on toward the Square H. Then they stopped, taking cover by setting themselves along the creek bank. This would force the Rio Kid and friends to ride a wide arc to by-pass them.

A hard fight was going on at Haskins' now. The killers had reached a wall on the west end and crouched close under it, the defenders unable to blast them away. The Rio Kid noted fresh streamers of smoke rolling up. The outlaws had fired the ranchhouse.

"Celestino!" Pryor cried. "Rush back and ask Major Wilson if he'll hustle. Tell him it's life and death. Those gunhands will cut down Haskins and all his men when the smoke flushes 'em out of the house."

The Mexican galloped off downstream.

## CHAPTER X

### *Haskins Rescued*

FIRING at the foe who crouched behind the bank drop, they pelted up the grassy slope, circling the danger point. Closer in, the Rio Kid could see two dead horses lying in the yard. And then he spied the unmoving, sprawled body of a cowboy.

Baldy Baldwin and Teton River Cal Doak calmly watched the Rio Kid and Cody for a time. Some of their men threw long shots at them. They were helpless, unable to force their way in, for they would be shot down in the broad daylight.

Below, the man-made hell raged on. One end of the ranchhouse was blazing. Baldwin was waiting with his marksmen to kill the few defenders when they were smoked out.

It seemed an interminable lull. The Rio Kid, Cody and Frankie stabbed in and out, but bullets kept them off. Then the bandits on the river trail rose up, mounted and galloped up to Baldwin.

The rangy chief swept off his hat and rubbed his bald pate. He jammed his Stetson down again, shook a fist at the Rio Kid and Cody, and threw a bony leg across his mustang. Baldy and Doak resumed their deliberate retirement, watching carefully back over their shoulders.

As soon as the outlaws were a short distance north of the house, figures of men, women and children hastily emerged from the opposite side. The wind was blowing smoke and the hot breath of the fire through the building. Closed doors inside had blocked off the deadly vapors, and these minutes of grace had spelled the difference between

life and death. The people staggered around, coughing and rubbing their stinging, smoke-blinded eyes.

Major Wilson was coming up, which explained Baldwin's retreat. Buffalo Bill and the Rio Kid rode in. Cody sang out to a tall, grim man with a lean, browned face.

"Howdy, Mister Haskins!"

Joe Haskins straightened up and trotted to meet them. He was gasping and tears streamed down his leathery cheeks.

"They hit us!" he cried. "Baldy Baldwin and his bunch, along with Cal Doak." Haskins was shaking with fury. "Killed one of my boys and wounded two more!"

"We're on Baldy's trail, now," Cody said, getting down. "Meet the Rio Kid. . . . This is Joe Haskins, Bob Pryor."

"Lease Ward told me about you," said Haskins. "You've been on our side, I understand. I got to form a bucket brigade." He called to the tow-haired giant who seemed to overflow his garments. "Grimes, hustle up. The house will be gone before you can cuss about it."

It was already too late, thought the Rio Kid, although he dismounted and gave a hand as a thin bucket line was formed to the creek.

Long Lew Grimes worked with the strength of three ordinary men. He had tremendous strength and a Texan's self-confidence. More waddies were on hand, as were three children. They, too, assisted in passing the pails.

In a few minutes, Major Wilson arrived with Celestino and an aide, his men strung out behind him. The recruits were saddle-sore and fed up with chasing the elusive outlaws. Baldwin and Doak were out of sight around a bluff which projected down to the river. The mounts which had been furnished to the soldiers were lathered, done in and unable to travel faster than a jog.

Wilson and several better-mounted subordinates trailed after Baldwin, but on reaching the bluff, beyond which they could see the bandits riding off on fresh mustangs, the major called a halt. All returned and joined in trying to put out the blazing ranchhouse.

Even Haskins and Long Lew threw up their hands after half an hour of it. They had only succeeded in raising clouds of steam, for the brisk breeze fanned the flames and the walls were dry slabs of pine. They drew off and Joe Haskins stared sadly at the ruins of his home.

"Well, I guess we bunk in the barn till we can build us another house, Mama," he said to his wife, putting a strong arm around her shoulders.

Mrs. Haskins was a slender, dark-haired woman of forty, with the pioneer spirit in her veins. She held back her tears at sight of their blazing ranch.

"It's all right, Joe! The children aren't hurt. We can make a go of it."

MAJOR WILSON'S seamed face was red from exertion, from the heat, and from anger at the outlaws with whom he had hoped to tangle. He wiped his brow with a large silk handkerchief and drew aside with the Rio Kid and Cody.

"See here, gentlemen," he said. "My general instructions from my superiors are not to make distant sallies from my base except under extreme circumstances. My chief job is to guard the Missouri bank and Fort Benton against marauding Indians. This is way out of my line, but I came because General Carr asked me to give you a hand when possible."

"I understand, sir," said the Rio Kid. "We're mighty obliged to you. I think the best thing is for Haskins to take his folks to the LW and stick with Ward till Cody and I can work this out. You can't overtake Baldwin and Doak, that's a cinch. I doubt if regular cavalry could come up with them if they didn't wish to engage. I'm sure they'll be back, too, soon as we leave. Baldwin is determined to finish off Ward and Haskins, and it's up to Billy and me."

They called Joe Haskins and put the situation to him in plain terms. At last the rancher nodded.

"I reckon you're right, gents," he agreed. "I'll go to Ward's till we straighten this out. But if I ever get Baldy and Doak in my gunsights, my hand won't waver, I tell you that!"

The house was caving in, the roof falling into the center of the conflagration and sending up showers of blazing embers. The barn and other outbuildings were kept wetted down so they would not catch fire. Smoke billowed up and the crackling noises filled the air.

Haskins gave orders to Long Lew Grimes and the Texan, along with the

other cowboys, hitched up a flat wagon. What equipment they decided to take along and the few pitiful belongings snatched from the ruin were thrown in the vehicle. Mrs. Haskins and the children sat on the blankets in the wagon bed, and one of Haskins' men drove them off downriver toward the LW Ranch.

Horses in the corrals were turned loose, save for those which were already saddled. The animals were terrified by the fire and difficulty was experienced in controlling them.

It was a sad procession that wound back down the creek, past Split Mountain. Joe Haskins, head down, kept looking back at pillars of smoke staining the morning sky.

Lease Ward welcomed them all, uttering words of comfort to his friend. He threw a bluff arm across Haskins' shoulders.

"Don't worry, Joe. We'll all go over there and help build you a new place, bigger and better than the one you've lost."

"Stick here till we settle Baldy's hash," advised the Rio Kid. "Buffalo Bill and I are going after him."

They were furious at Baldwin and Doak on two scores. First the bandits had delivered the guns to the Sioux. Now they had smashed at the decent ranchers.

Major Wilson was giving his men a rest and had ordered the horses unsaddled and turned out to graze. The women at the LW—Carolyn and Mrs. Ward—hurried to prepare food and drink for the tired people. Buddy and the Haskins children began romping by the river. The soldiers lounged in the shade, dozing or smoking.

The Rio Kid, Cody and Mireles were worn to a frazzle after the long fight. They ate, and then turned in for some rest.

In the late afternoon Bob Pryor emerged from the haymow and washed up. Carolyn had a pot of coffee on the back of the stove and Lieutenant Eggleston was sitting at the kitchen table. The young officer was rapidly regaining strength and could walk around without aid. The Rio Kid guessed that Carolyn and the handsome West Pointer were very much interested in one another.

Major Wilson wanted to be back at his post before dark. As long as the troopers were around, Baldwin and Doak would not reattack. The commandant said goodby to those he had come to assist, the order to mount was given, and the small party crossed the creek and took the trail to Fort Benton.

"What say we pick up Baldy's sign before it's too dark, Billy?" suggested the Rio Kid.

Buffalo Bill was agreeable. The scouts were men of steel, used to living in the saddle. Inaction palled upon them. They spoke again with Ward and Haskins.

"Keep close to the ranch, gents," said the Rio Kid. "And maintain a guard day and night. Baldy will be back. We're going out to see what we can do about it."

"It's hard to know how to thank you," said Lease Ward.

"We're sure obliged," nodded Joe Haskins.

"We got a score to settle with those wolves ourselves," Buffalo Bill said, smiling.

BUFFALO BILL, the Rio Kid and Mireles swung into saddle and headed north on the river road. Soon they passed Split Mountain and jogged on, circling around the blackened ruins of Haskins' house. It was still smouldering, but the worst of it was over. In the vast Land of Shining Mountains this was but an infinitesimal area scorched by fire, but it had represented years of labor and hope to the Haskins.

"This is a mining country. Have you thought of that, Billy?" said the Rio Kid, glancing at his trail partner.

Buffalo Bill nodded. "Sure. Ward's adobe walls balked Doak and Baldwin, along with what the soldiers and we could do. But they'd have had Ward out and shot down before we could come up, if the house hadn't held."

"Must be plenty of blasting powder held at Fort Benton, en route to the mines," went on the Rio Kid. "I suppose Baldy will think of it now. Anyway that's what I figure. He'll be back and blast his way through."

"He'll have to get in close to do it, though."

They talked it over, at the same time watching the hoofmarks left by the passing bands of outlaws. After another mile, Baldwin and Doak had crossed the river and swung right, at a long angle.

"Looks like they're making for Benton," observed Bob Pryor.

He was right. When darkness fell, they could see the yellow glow of the bustling river port just ahead. Baldy Baldwin and Teton River Cal Doak had entered the settlement, bold as brass. The soldiers would be at the fort, for the most part, and there were plenty of dives in which the bandits were welcome as long as they had money to spend. Greed and fear motivated those who served such men. It was death to oppose them and most citizens made the best of a bad situation.

"I ain't in favor of riding into the limelight," drawled Buffalo Bill drily.

"I thought you enjoyed it, Billy, the way you put on those shows," jested the Rio Kid.

"Yeah, but the boys fire blanks mostly. Baldy don't."

They left their horses outside the town, with Mireles on guard, and stole toward the center, checking every possible ambush point. It was possible that the bandits would have spies and sentries at strategic spots. They were hunting trouble as they searched for the killer chief, aware that what they did meant survival or death for Ward and Haskins, their friends at the LW.

* * * * *

The Rio Kid snuggled against the tarpaper roof, keeping very still as he listened to the coarse voices in the room below, just across a narrow alley between the buildings. He and Cody had finally located Baldy Baldwin and Cal Doak. They had spied a couple of toughs they had fought against previously, and these men were hanging around a dive a block from the Royal Flush Saloon on the main thoroughfare.

This clue had led them to check up on the rear chambers, and in one they had glimpsed the bald-pated chief and the huge Doak seated at a table, dining and drinking with a couple of girls in short-skirted, spangled dresses.

Moving with the silence and invisibility of a stalking cat, the Rio Kid had reached the flat roof of the adjoining store, darkened in the night. By peeking over the gutter he could look through the open window and observe his foes.

Baldy was smoking a Cuban cheroot, a glass of red Frontier whisky at hand. He rubbed his bald pate reflectively as he listened to the giggling prattle of the women. Doak slouched over the table. The rustler was most formidable, and savage as a wild beast. Most men would think twice before bracing him.

Baldy drew a black skullcap from a pocket and fixed it on his head. "I feel a draft," he remarked, and the girls laughed.

His big yellow teeth showed in a grin. He had on his frock coat, the stock at his turkey craw. Gray breeches were thrust into shining black boots. His black Stetson hung from the back of his chair.

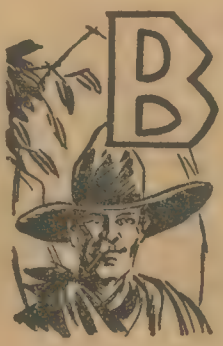
"Yes, girls, I lost my hair when I was only a kid. Smallpox or somethin'. Sometimes I miss it. Indians don't respect you if you're bald. Still, that's an advantage, as they can't scalp you."

Doak threw a tumbler of whisky down his throat. He wiped his vicious mouth with the back of a soiled hand the size of a ham.

"Beat it, girls," he ordered. "We'll see you later. Got business to talk over."

## CHAPTER XI

### *An Overheard Conversation*



BALDWIN gave the girls some money and they went out, shutting the door behind them. Doak and Baldwin drew their chairs closer together.

"I sent for the blasting powder, Baldy," growled Teton River Cal. "Scales has plenty of it, and fuses too, in his hardware store. Sells it to miners headin' West."

"You reckon he'll let us have what we want, and tonight?" Baldy asked.

"He better or he'll deal with me," said Doak grimly. "The boys will find him and rout out the cuss. We can fix up bombs out of cans and toss 'em in. They'll wreck Ward's walls."

Baldy nodded. He exhaled clouds of cigar smoke, which drifted slowly to the hot, hanging oil lamp over the center of the table. "That should be easy enough, but we need to get close in for the job, Cal. Do you remember last fall when the Sioux caught that wood detail near Fort Peck? Some of the Indians stripped the bodies and kept the uniforms. Well, I've

got 'em. I figgered they might come in handy sometime, and I was right. This is it."

Doak's black eyes fixed with admiration on Baldwin. "I savvy!" he said at last. "Baldy, you're a genius! We'll own this country yet! What did you do, buy them from the redskins?"

"Traded them for some useless trinkets and a jug of firewater. Nothin' to it. I got them in my room at Madame Lewis' boarding house."

"Why, our fellers can ride right up to Ward's with army blue on their cussed hides!" Doak laughed with glee at the prospect of such a trick. "I hope I see Ward's face when he realizes he's been tricked. Boy, that will be sport!" He slapped his heavy thigh, overcome with the sardonic and deadly humor of it.

Baldy was pleased at Doak's reaction. While Doak might be more dangerous in a physical encounter, Baldwin was shrewder and the top brains of the combination. The rangy chief drew folded papers from an inside pocket.

"These got to be right, Cal. They're iron-clad claims to the LW and Square H. Like those sidewinders said, though, men like you and me don't go into territorial court unless they're dragged!" Baldy clicked his tongue and ran a suggestive finger around his gullet. "I'll have a pard, someone in the clear, file for us."

Doak shrugged, clenching a great fist on the table. "Put Ward and his bunch out of the way. They can't annoy us any more when the buffalo are stampin' over their graves."

"We'll do that," Baldy agreed. "But afterwards we want it shipshape, so none of those smart banker rascals from the East can sneak in and hog our show. Boy," gloated Baldy, "when we're rich I'll buy me a fleet of steamers, fill them with guns and such, and outfit every Indian this side of Hades! I'll show Gall and Crazy Horse how to use light artillery. That will make a hit, huh? I'll set up a red empire, with me the boss!"

Doak goggled, astonished at Baldwin's grandiose scheme. Over on the other side of the honkytonk, Buffalo Bill Cody was hidden, ready to help the Rio Kid. Music and yells, thudding boots, whining roulette wheels, clacking dice and clink of glass told that Fort Benton was humming.

A knock on the door caused both men to turn that way. Hands dropped to ready Colts. Doak sang out, "Come in!" The portal slowly opened and an outlaw nodded and stepped into the private room. The Rio Kid had seen this stocky, brown-bearded killer on previous occasions. He had been in Cal Doak's band and taken part in the fighting.

"Howdy, Reilly!" said Doak. "How did you make out?"

"I got the stuff from Scales," answered Doak's lieutenant. "It's packed and hid, ready when you need it."

"*Bueno!* Have a drink."

Reilly filled a glass and tossed it off. His hard-looking eyes protruded like marbles. He smacked his lips, poured another drink. The raw whiskey burned like fire, but Reilly seemed immune to the poison.

"When you go through the bar, tell Gerty and Verna we're waitin' for 'em," ordered Baldwin. "See you tomorrow, Reilly."

The bandit assistant nodded and went out. The girls soon returned to the table and the quartet began joking, drinking and singing. It looked as though Baldy and Doak were set for the evening. The Rio Kid snaked back, dropped to the dark road at the rear of the buildings on the main stem and stole off to make his rendezvous with Buffalo Bill Cody.

PRYOR waited a half hour at the spot a block away from the honkytonk before Cody arrived.

"Did you see Bullhead Reilly?" asked Buffalo Bill, as he joined the Rio Kid. "He's a tough killer. Braced him before."

"I saw him." The Rio Kid told what he had overheard. "Like we figured, Baldy will blast Ward's house walls in. He's got some army uniforms for his men, which will let them get in close. Reilly arranged for the explosives and knows where they are. Do you suppose we could smell the stuff out by trailing Reilly?"

"We can try. But there's plenty more around if we do get it. What are those papers Baldy had?"

"Deeds and claims he's fixed up to grab the LW and the Square H for himself and Doak. Come on, I don't want to lose sight of Reilly. He might move on."

After a hunt they sighted the stocky

outlaw in the Royal Flush. Reilly's only diversion seemed to be drinking. He did not play at the tables, and the dancehall girls failed to interest him. But methodically, one after another, he threw down glass after glass of whisky.

"No man can stand that forever," remarked the Rio Kid, as they peeked through a window at the side of the long bar. "Even an iron statue would dissolve!"

After a time, Reilly left the Royal Flush. He stalked up the street and there was scarcely a stagger in his stolid pace. He paused under a lantern affixed to a post at a corner and drew something from his pocket. Holding it in the flat of his hand, Reilly stared at it for a moment, then put it back and shoved along. His next port of call was another saloon. Here he repeated his endurance feat, spending half an hour there before moving along.

"If he's not careful he's going to get dizzy," jested Buffalo Bill.

The Rio Kid and Cody had seen plenty of barflies and champion sots, but Reilly beat all records. He made the rounds of all the saloons, pausing now and then, as he had before, to glance at whatever it was he had in his pocket. The pair on his trail could not make out just what it was, for the bulky figure cupped in his hand.

When the bandit had visited every oasis in Fort Benton, he started on a second round. Halfway through he had to put out his hand and rest a minute, holding to an awning post, feet spread wide on the board sidewalk. The amazed scouts watched from a nearby corner.

Reilly gruffly cleared his throat. He removed his hat and scratched his head, dropped the Stetson, stooped to pick it up. But this proved fatal. He half fell, half dove under the hitch-rail, head and shoulders in the gutter. Horses shied and backed away from him, but he did not move again.

"Let's get him," said the Rio Kid.

The coast seemed clear and they hurried out. Reilly was heavy, but Cody grabbed his ankles, Pryor his arms, and they soon had him in the dark areaway beside a building. The Rio Kid stole back to the lighted street to make certain no more of Baldy's followers had seen the play.

They had to carry Reilly all the way, heading for the little shed near the river which had come in so handy when they had been watching the warehouse. Cody's friend worked nights and the shack was dark and deserted now. They dumped Reilly unceremoniously on the dirt floor, covered the window and door and lighted a candle stub.

Reilly lay on his back and might as well have been dead, except that now and then he did draw in a stertorous breath. The scouts squatted alongside his reeking figure and the Rio Kid began to search him. They were very curious as to the talisman in which Reilly had appeared to take such interest when he had strolled along the street between saloons.

The Rio Kid soon brought it forth and they stared at it, silent as they sought to figure it out.

"So that's it!" growled Buffalo Bill finally.

Bob Pryor nodded. "Remember, Reilly was with Cal Doak that afternoon I first joined you at Split Mountain, after the run with the lieutenant? This sort of explains a lot I didn't really savvy, Billy."

He went back in his mind to the scene, when the scouts had been hidden on the hill, watching Cal Doak and his owlhooters watering their mustangs below, in the creek.

IN THE distance they could hear the night noises of Fort Benton, loud and raucous. They were thinking over what was to be done.

"Major Wilson can't help us," said the Rio Kid. "He hasn't got the men, Billy."

Cody agreed. "This town is swarming with Baldy's bunch. I'd say we might try for Doak and Baldwin, only I doubt if we could take them and hold them. We were lucky with Reilly, him passing out like that."

"General Carr's the only answer, Billy," Pryor said. "We've got to bring him into it again. With the troopers and what Ward, Haskins and we can muster, we might crush that band of Baldy's."

"How do you expect to come up with them? General Carr couldn't. They'll be watching for the troopers. They'll simply run for the woods and wait till Carr has to pull out, the way they did before. Baldy's determined to wipe out Ward and Haskins, and now I know why." Buffalo Bill was frowning. "May-

be we ought to fetch the ranchers and their folks to the fort, Rio Kid. Baldwin will go for them hammer and tongs, till he's won."

The Rio Kid shook his head. "That would mean giving Baldy full possession and he'd grab it pronto. Ward would never get back his ranch. Do you reckon Carr will come if we ask him?"

"I believe so. He's just as sore about those guns as we are, Rio Kid, and willing to arrest Baldwin and those responsible. He knows Baldwin and Doak intend to go on arming the Indians. There will be more loads of contraband coming upriver."

"Bullhead" Reilly grunted then. His face began to twitch. For a time they watched him as he grimaced, sticking out his tongue, stretching his bearded lips. He even opened his red-rimmed eyes, but they were glassy and protruding and saw nothing.

The Rio Kid seized Reilly's shoulder and shook him. At first there was no response, then Reilly tried to curse.

"Hey, Reilly, this is the boss—Baldy!" the Rio Kid said. "Doak's here, too. See him? Where's that blasting powder and the caps? We need them pronto to blow up Ward and his cussed pards."

"'S all right," muttered Reilly. "Packed—at the hangout—Mulehide—"

The Rio Kid kept at it. "You've forgotten the day, cuss you! Cal told you and so did I." He repeated this several times and at last Reilly answered him.

"Ain't forget . . . Friday . . . Friday . . ."

It was a struggle for the killer to speak, but he was under the domination of his bosses and stupefied though he was, he tried to reply.

"We'll have to chance it that he means this coming Friday," said the Rio Kid in a low voice which did not penetrate to Reilly's consciousness.

"Today's Tuesday," Cody said. "No, it's Wednesday, for it's after midnight. I doubt if we could fetch General Carr up in time, Rio Kid."

"We must try it. Will you ride for us, Billy? Don't waste another hour. We'd better dump Reilly before he comes to enough to recognize us."

They carried the limp outlaw between them and left him in a gutter at the south end of Fort Benton. Here he could sleep it off, and his friends could pick him up next day. It was doubtful if Reilly would retain any recollection of the scene at the shack.

The Rio Kid accompanied Cody to the spot on the outskirts of Fort Benton where Celestino Mireles awaited them, the three mounts under his skillful care. The Mexican was a genius with horseflesh and kept the animals soothed and in ready condition.

Cody checked his Colts, and his white teeth flashed in a goodby smile.

"Hope we make it, that's all I got to say, Rio Kid. See you Friday, if I still got my hair."

He shoved off into the darkness, circling the lurid glow of the roaring Frontier town. Bob Pryor was sorry to see him go, for Buffalo Bill was a tower of strength. It was a tossup whether or not they could muster the power needed to halt Baldy Baldwin.

"What now, General?" asked Mireles softly, as they watched Cody fade into the darkness.

The Rio Kid fixed a quirly and enjoyed the smoke while he informed the Mexican of all they had managed to ferret out that evening. Celestino was impressed.

"They blow them up at Senor Ward's, *si. Es muy malo.*"

"*Si*, very bad," Pryor agreed. "That's an angle I don't cotton to, letting the sidewinders get close with the explosives. Those bombs could hurt a bunch of the folks if they go off, no matter what we are able to do in the end. I wish I could locate them. Of course, if we steal them outright, Baldwin and Doak will simply buy more." He thought over the problem for a time. "It's worth a stab," he decided at last. "I'll see if I can find the stuff. Maybe I can spike the game without them savvyin'."

THE RANGER RIDES TO TOWN

*A Chick Bowdrie Story*

By LOUIS L'AMOUR

NEXT ISSUE

## CHAPTER XII

*Powder Keg*

WITH time to kill, Pryor did not intend to waste it. He knew his costume and figure were distinctive and if seen in Benton might bring his foes upon him. Mireles had a dark serape rolled in his pack and the Rio Kid borrowed it, draping it over his shoulders so that it covered his body down to the knees.

With Celestino's sombrero on his head in place of his own Stetson, he thought he could pass muster if none of his enemies came too close to him in lighted areas. He darkened his cheeks by rubbing clay on them and strolled back toward the middle of town, Mireles trailing him at a safe distance.

A hardware store stood across the main street from the Royal Flush. "Edw. R. Scales. Hardware. M'ng Supplies," proclaimed the long sign over the emporium, which was darkened for the night. The Rio Kid drew closer. Obviously, the store was closed. He went around to the rear.

There was a door and stoop, and the two windows in back had curtains in them. It looked as if the owner and his wife might live there. Reilly must have contacted Scales after closing hours.

Hunting a clue, Pryor decided to take a chance on the merchant. It was not illegal to sell guns, ammunition and explosives to white men. He went up on the low porch and rapped sharply on the back door. After several minutes of waiting and knocking, a man's irritated voice spoke from within. It came from the window on the Rio Kid's right.

"Is that you again, Reilly? Why in blue blazes are you annoyin' me this time of night?"

"I need to talk with you, Mister Scales," the Rio Kid said. "I'm not Reilly. My name is Pryor."

"Go away and come back in the morning," replied the storekeeper. "I open at seven o'clock."

"It will be too late then. This is a matter of life and death. Are you a friend of Lease Ward and Joe Haskins? They're in terrible danger and I'm trying to give them a hand."

There was a brief silence inside, but the ranchers' names seemed to have done the trick. A bolt slid back and the door opened a crack. A man peeked out, suspiciously.

"You better be alone," he said softly. "There's been a lot of holdups lately and I ain't standing for any. I'm armed."

"I'm no robber, Mister Scales," Pryor said, raising his hands to his shoulders to show they were empty.

The merchant pulled back the door and the Rio Kid stepped in.

"Don't talk too loud," Scales warned. "My wife's sleeping in the next room."

He struck a match and touched the flame to a candle. The Rio Kid saw before him a middle-aged, honest-looking man in an old pair of trousers he had pulled on, a Colt thrust into his belt. Scales had graying hair but a strong, stubborn face.

Pryor had removed the high-peaked sombrero. The storekeeper watched him suspiciously, for the visitor's face was clay-stained and the pistols could be seen as the cloak swept back. But the Rio Kid spoke persuasively and took a seat on a stool Scales pointed at.

"Mister Scales, you mentioned a cuss named Reilly. He works for Teton River Cal Doak and Baldy Baldwin." The Rio Kid did not miss Scales' slight start. "Ward and Haskins are honest men, which is a lot more than can be said for Doak and Baldy. I'm taking it for granted you're on Ward's side. All decent folks must be. The outlaws have attacked the ranchers, tried to kill them. Haskins' ranch was burned over his head. Baldwin won't rest till he's wiped out the LW and Square H."

Scales was loath to commit himself. Finally he growled, "Who sent you here?"

"I came on my own. I learned a short time ago that you'd sold blasting powder, fuses and caps to this Reilly. Do you know what they intend to use them for?"

Scales shrugged. "How should I know? It ain't my business. I suppose they aim to do some mining and crack a few seams."

"No, they're going to manufacture grenades to toss at the walls of Ward's house," Pryor said. "It means death and maiming to those inside unless we

can check Baldy's game."

Scales gulped. He looked stricken, worried. "Baldwin and Doak are tough customers, every which way," he muttered.

"You're afraid of the bandits and I don't blame you," Pryor nodded. "They'd think nothing of coming for you and drilling you if you braced them."

Scales nodded. "Look at my position. We got no real law here, mister. I'm alone. I've heard the outlaws ain't beyond torturin' folks they take a dislike to. I ain't the only one in Benton who sells 'em what they want and no questions asked."

"I understand. I'm not asking you to buck them. But I hope to locate the explosives and scotch Baldy's trick. Have you any idea where Reilly might have hid the stuff he bought from you?"

"Yes." Scales seemed to have made up his mind. "I'll tell what I can."

"That's the talk," Pryor said. "Baldy has a room at Madame Lewis', hasn't he?"

"That's right. Uses it when he's in town. But Mulehide Si Latham and a bunch of the rascals, includin' Bullhead Reilly, have their headquarters up the road a piece. You know the Palace Saloon?"

"I've seen it."

"Well, hid behind the main shebang is a long stable. The outlaws keep their saddles, spare guns and ammunition in there and have it outfitted with bunks. I can't say for certain that Reilly went there, but I peeked at him out the window when he left with the powder keg and he swung in beside the Palace."

"*Gracias,*" Pryor thanked him. "It sounds likely. You may have helped save a lot of decent folks from injury and death. You savvy a good deal about this kind of thing. I've been trying to figure how I can spoil Baldy's game without him finding out till the bombs are tossed. Suppose I wet down the blasting powder?"

Scales shook his head. "They'd notice it right off when they began fillin' the grenades. And when it dried out it might go off, anyhow."

"Is there anything I could substitute for the real stuff, in case I can get into that shed and find the keg?"

"Now you have it!"

Scales turned and beckoned to Pryor to follow him. He led the Rio Kid through a short corridor into a storeroom. Here he rummaged around for a time, Pryor holding the candle for him. He came up with a small, metal-hooped keg and carried it back to the kitchen.

"See this? It's a standard keg such as explosives come in and like the one I sold Reilly." The signs on the little cask warned of danger within, painted in large letters. "Well, I was took in one time. This is filled with a mixture of charcoal, ground rock salt and dirt. It looked exactly like blasting powder."

"That's the ticket!" Pryor exclaimed. "How much do I owe you?"

"Not even two-bits, friend. Ward and Haskins are good men. Anything I can do for them beyond acting as a human sacrifice, let me know."

Pryor left with his prize. Celestino was awaiting him close at hand. He told the Mexican what he had learned. They crossed dark passageways and paused not far from the back of the Palace Saloon, which was only a few doors from the honkytonk in which Cal Doak and Baldy Baldwin were enjoying their supper party.

"Keep the keg and stand ready," ordered the Rio Kid.

He stole closer to the long stable, easily recognized from Scales' description. It had small square windows along its wooden walls, doors at front and back, and a third door stood open on the side toward Pryor's position. Keeping low, he reached one of the windows, peeked through.

The first thing he saw was Mulehide Si Latham, standing at a table-bench with his back to the Rio Kid. Latham was in dirty clothing. His hat was off, exposing his bleached, stringy hair. On the bench before him stood several large tincans, which he had been emptying and wiping out. Beside tools and a collection of junk, the table held a flask of whiskey which Mulehide now and then consulted. Around the shed crude bunks covered with horse blankets had been fixed. The floor was clay.

Saddles, racks or rifles, shotguns, ammunition holders, and other equipment could be seen.

LATHAM glanced around. His thin face, with the close-set, mean eyes and traplike mouth, was visible to the Rio Kid. There were two more of the outlaws at the far end, lounging on

bunks. Each had a bottle of liquor for himself. Evidently they were the home guard.

"I got a mind to fill one and try her out," remarked Mulehide in his unpleasant voice. "It would wake up this town!"

He kicked at a piece of tarpaulin covering something under the table. The Rio Kid's quick eye sighted the bottom of the brown keg, similar to the one Scales had given him.

"Reilly said leave it till Doak and Baldy come," growled one of the gunhands from his bunk. "You heard him."

"Oh, well." Mulehide shrugged. "Guess I'll mosey on down the line and talk to the girls. I ain't stuck here like you boys are."

Latham had his sixshooter at his hip, and his coiled bullwhip hung from his wide belt. Such whip experts as he could kill a horsefly or rip out a man's eye with the cracking tip.

Mulehide departed. The Rio Kid drew back, found Mireles where he had left him.

"Leave the keg," he ordered. "Get over on the other side, at that end, and make enough fuss to draw them out. There's only two left."

Celestino glided away. Pryor lifted the keg, pushed back to the sagging door at the dark extremity of the stable. The sound of stones being hurled against the wooden walls came to him. Celestino was at work.

The two guards alerted, rose up cursing. One seized a sawed-off shotgun, the other jerked a Colt from a holster hanging on a peg.

"Who's that?" sang out the shotgunner. And then both ducked out.

They had scarcely vacated the stable when the Rio Kid jumped in at the other end. Quickly he raised the tarpaulin, rolled out the keg and placed the one given him by Scales under the cover. The little cask containing the real blasting powder under his left arm, he made for the doorway. Then the shotgun roared in the night.

This worried the Rio Kid, for the buckshot would spread and might slash his partner. Pistols began cracking. The Rio Kid hastily hunted a place where he might hide the cask. At a corner of the building stood a hogshead which caught rainwater from the roof, useful for fighting fire or for stock. It was nearly full. He knew the tight little keg would float. With a pistol butt he rapped in the wooden head and then shoved the cask under the water, holding it there till it filled and stayed down.

Meanwhile, the shooting and yelling had increased. He heard an unearthly scream that sounded like Mireles in the last gasp of agony. Believing his friend might have been wounded, he dashed full-tilt around the corner, Colt in hand.

A lantern hung over the open doorway nearest the Palace. This was the main entry to the stable. As he made the swing, the Rio Kid saw Mulehide Si standing a few paces away, staring at him in astonishment. The hubbub had brought Latham rushing back to see what was going on. He recognized the scout and reacted with spasmodic speed. He reached for his whip rather than his revolver, many such men preferring the lash at close quarters.

Even as the Rio Kid spread his high-heeled boots to brace himself, whirling into a shooting stance, the long lash snapped out. He tried to duck but only succeeded in turning his check. The leaded tip ripped a chunk from his flesh and the shocking sting of it wrecked his aim.

He went down on one knee but he kept his head, fighting for a chance to fire, aware that he had only one brief second, for Latham had jerked back the whip for a skilled attack that would wrap the leather around Pryor's gun arm and hold him helpless as Mulehide shot into him.

The Rio Kid threw himself about and got off a quick shot at Latham. It hit Mulehide in the right shoulder and the lash dropped in mid-air, then fell to the ground. Latham whirled, yelling his head off. He stumbled, fell flat on the ground and called for help.

Past the circle of lantern light, guns were blazing. The Rio Kid, blood streaming from his numbed cheek, braced himself with his left hand against the stable wall. He came up to his knees, gun gripped tight. Teeth clenched, he sought clarity of brain and vision. Hoarse cries came from the honkytonk past the Palace, in the back room of which Baldy Baldwin and Cal Doak had been sitting. As his eyes cleared, he saw Teton River's huge figure coming at him, with Baldwin following at his heels.

"It's the Rio Kid!" shrieked Baldwin.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *"Throw Down Your Arms!"*

CAL DOAK was several paces in advance. He charged like an enraged buffalo bull, drawing a revolver and pulling trigger again and again. Bullets rapped into the wall only inches from Bob Pryor. The Rio Kid threw a shot back. He knew he had made a hit, but the giant did not veer.

"I'll tear you to shreds, you cussed eyeballer!" roared Doak, still moving forward.

Baldwin had been left behind in the rush and could not shoot because of Doak's intervening body. He was more cautious than his partner and went down on one knee to make ready, as the Rio Kid tried again. It seemed that lead would not check Doak for he did not falter.

However, Teton River Cal's slugs missed Pryor. The Rio Kid aimed for the head and raised his thumb off the hammer spur. Doak's Colt blared in his face. Powder burned his bleeding cheek and his ear. He was deafened and blinded by the close blast of Doak's heavy revolver.

Teton River Cal was dead, shot through the brain. He had begun to fall, impetus toppling him toward the crouched scout, and this had caused the near miss. The heavy body, doubling over, struck Pryor and knocked him against the stable wall.

Perhaps this saved the Rio Kid from Baldy's carefully aimed fire. Streams of men, urged by Baldwin, rushed from various points toward the center of the disturbance. They were rustlers and gunrunners, for the most part, and they would destroy Bob Pryor.

He pushed Doak's body from his legs and rolled over into the wide stable doorway. He shoved to his feet and began to run for the far end. His breath came in terrible gasps and he was covered with clay and muck. His cheek felt twice its normal size and was bleeding steadily.

The hard-pressed fugitive flashed through the other exit and made for the darker areas. Fort Benton was boiling with the fury of his enemies. He had slain Teton River Cal Doak and for that the Missouri River wolves would never forgive him.

The Rio Kid, battered and near the end of his tether, was traveling on sheer nerve. Gunmen were hunting him through the byways. Saber and the paint horse were on the other side of the settlement, which meant a long, perilous run. He had to round the north end of the town. Already some of the outlaws had mounted and were streaking up the rutted main stem.

Pryor dodged in and out, peeking from behind a building occasionally to locate his swarming foes. Many figures moved in the streets, and the bandits were poking into dark corners, hunting him.

When at last he reached the spot where he had left Saber, both mounts were gone. He glanced back, swaying on his aching legs. A line of gunslingers were working toward him, combing the town.

"General!" came a glad cry out of the darkness.

Celestino Mireles rode from the gloom beyond, leading the dun with the black stripe down his spine. He had returned a minute or two ahead of Pryor, had taken charge of the horses so the enemy could not seize them.

Pryor grasped the saddle-horn and pulled himself onto the horse. He was unable to speak for a time, sagging in his saddle as he let Saber gallop beside the paint horse.

Mireles was in fine fettle, unhurt. "I sting them, *si*, General! They chase me and I howl like a coyote." He realized that his comrade was about done in. There was anxiety in his voice as he inquired, "You are hit?"

The Rio Kid pulled himself together. He had enough breath to whisper hoarsely, "Nothing bad. Make for the LW."

Behind them rose the wolfish threat of Baldwin's band. The Mexican understood, and they set their course for Lease Ward's ranch.

WELL concealed in the barn out from the adobe walls of the LW ranchhouse, the Rio Kid was spying from a small window, watching for the approach of the enemy. It was Friday and dawn had just broken. All seemed

very quiet and peaceful around the ranch. Apparently the cowmen were off guard, still asleep, though the hour for rising would soon come.

Mireles was there, crouched down, grasping his rifle, as were other men hidden there, waiting.

Pryor's left cheek was raw and lacerated, marking the point where Mulehide Si Latham's whip had ripped it. In the Rio Kid's hand were his field glasses and he kept raising them, studying the trail down across the stream.

Nearby was Lieutenant Harvey Eggleston, who had so improved that he felt ready for action and had insisted on taking full part in the defense of the LW against Baldy Baldwin's all-out attack. Still pale under his tan, Eggleston had his loaded rifle beside him.

"Here they come!" announced the Rio Kid suddenly.

Hands caressed carbines and revolvers, to make sure the weapons were ready for instant use. It gave them something to do while the last, tense minutes dragged along.

"Remember, boys, don't shoot till you get the order, no matter what happens," reminded Bob Pryor.

He stood to one side of the barn window, which gave him a view toward the trail from Fort Benton. He focused on the dozen horsemen who had just hove into sight. They wore army blue, with campaign hats strapped on their heads. They looked like a squad of troopers, jogging stolidly behind their lieutenant. At the saddle cantle they carried rolled packs, several very bulky.

Nearer and nearer approached the soldiers until they were on the east bank of the little river serving Ward's place.

"That's Bullhead Reilly leading them," whispered the Rio Kid.

A deathlike silence held the ranch. Reilly had clipped his beard in the hope of disguising himself somewhat, as he put into operation Baldy Baldwin's ruse for opening up the LW to assault. The men in army blue splashed across the shallows and came toward the ranch yard.

Lease Ward opened the kitchen door and stepped outside. Bullhead Reilly, neck pulled in like a retiring turtle's, raised a gauntleted hand signaling friendship. No rancher would think of firing on soldiers. Ward waved back in greeting. Reilly and the disguised killers with him picked up to a trot.

The tension seemed unbearable. Fingers in the barn itched to squeeze trigger. But the Rio Kid would not give the word.

Ward stayed close to the open doorway. Reilly was coming at him, hat pulled low, shoulders hunched. Bullhead wished to get near enough before giving away the trick.

"Good morning, Mister Ward," sang out Reilly. "We're from the post. Major Wilson sent us after some outlaws who shot one of our boys last night."

"Glad to see you!" called Lease Ward hospitably.

A breath later the Texan lunged back inside the house as Bullhead Reilly ripped out his revolver and fired hastily. Several of the supposed troopers had swung in their saddles and brought out shining cans from which short gray fuses projected. They drove in their spurs and swept up to the adobe walls.

The battle had begun.

FUSES were sparking and half a dozen grenades were tossed at the building. One rolled through the door behind which Lease Ward had disappeared. The attackers zigzagged, pouring in lead to hold the defenders within.

"Keep down!" ordered the Rio Kid, as a Bar H cowboy shifted impatiently.

This was why he had risked his own life—to spike Baldwin's bombs. There was always the chance they might have discovered the substitution of dud powder for the real thing. He peeked through a crack, watching one of the cans which had come to rest against a side wall of the ranchhouse. The fuse smoked and burned to the point where it disappeared through the hole in the top of the can. The Rio Kid held his breath.

Long Lew Grimes, who was watching at the south side of the barn, gave a signal.

"There's Baldy Baldwin," said the Texas giant in a low, calm voice.

The Rio Kid glided over. Baldwin was coming at the head of his renegade wolf pack. His own gunrunners were with him and so were the rustlers who had traveled with the deceased Cal Doak. Colts, shotguns and carbines glinted in the morning light as the ferocious killers rode full-tilt at the LW Ranch.

"Now he's committed himself," said

the Rio Kid to Lieutenant Eggleston. "Keep shut, boys. You'll have a jawful of fighting in a few minutes!"

Baldwin rushed by the barn, the many hoofs raising dust and a low, ominous thunder. The outlaws pulled rein, jumping from their saddles, while holders assigned beforehand grasped the bunched leather straps to control the mustangs and hold open the avenue for escape if such became necessary.

The Rio Kid crossed to the north window. The fuses on the bombs had petered out, smoking harmlessly. No explosion had come from the kitchen into which one of the cans had been hurled. Bullhead Reilly and the bogus soldiers had ridden down the line and were turning for the back run. They stared in astonishment as the grenades failed to explode.

Baldy Baldwin was raving, cursing at the top of his voice.

"In and at 'em!" he bellowed. "Charge!"

Long Lew Grimes looked at the Rio Kid, who nodded.

"All right," Pryor called. "Let's go!"

The big Texan bounded from the barn with surprising agility. The Rio Kid, Mireles and two cowboys went with him. They streaked toward the horseholds, guns up. Grimes was giving the Rebel yell, high-pitched, bloodcurdling. They were upon the dancing mounts before the few caretakers could act.

Long Lew reached out and seized a bandit, pulled him loose, hurled him to the ground where he lay stunned. The Rio Kid fired at another, who let go his reins to yank a Colt. With Grimes throwing his foes this way and that, plus a few shots, the outlaws' horses were freed, stampeded by the gunfire and the yelling.

This accomplished and escape cut off for the major portion of the enemy, the Rio Kid swerved toward the main engagement. Buffalo Bill Cody had emerged from the front door of the ranchhouse, guns flaming. LW and Square-H men followed, clashing with the bandits on that end. Volleys roared out, echoing through the Montana wilderness. Puffs of smoke came from loopholes, came from the lower window corners. . .

Baldy Baldwin and his main band, charging the house, realized they were cut off. They had to break up the defense. They were piling up, beating at a closed side door. There were none of the breaches here they had expected to find in the adobe walls.

Eggleston and others were shooting from the barn. Lease Ward and Joe Haskins held the house. Then the bunkhouse door opened and General Eugene A. Carr lunged outside, pistol cocked and raised. His fighting troopers streamed from the building, carbines leveled on the massed outlaws.

The Rio Kid had planned it well. Aware that the elusive bandits could not be overtaken, would never strike if they knew such strength was concentrated at the LW, he had held out the bait and Baldy Baldwin had snapped at it. Carr and Buffalo Bill had brought in the cavalry under cover of darkness, after a forced march from Bearloop Crossing. They had been there scarcely two hours when the attack had opened.

"Throw down your arms and surrender!" called Carr. It was in the name of the United States.

## CHAPTER XIV

*Gold!*

LONG LEW GRIMES surged past the Rio Kid and tore into the confused, milling outlaws. He began picking them up and throwing them around whooping it up with, "Hurrah for Texas! Hurrah for Sam Houston!"

The Rio Kid smiled to himself as Long Lew made himself and the Lone Star State known on another field of battle.

Baldy Baldwin had broken off from the pack and scuttled toward Bullhead Reilly. Several of Reilly's fake troopers had jerked rein and were stealing away from there. But Reilly, seeing his chief's peril, had ridden down a free mustang and was hurrying back, leading the horse to his evil master.

"Baldy!" shouted the Rio Kid, rushing that way.

He fired and Baldwin's Stetson lifted off his head. The bald pate gleamed and Pryor could see the long, yellowed face of the gunrunner as Baldy turned and

looked over his bony shoulder.

Baldwin's chief idea was escape. Carr's troopers, Buffalo Bill and the rest, were upon the Missouri River wolves, covering them with carbine and Colt. Fierce as they were, the outlaws knew it was hopeless. Horses gone, in the open against the adobe wall, only certain death awaited them if they persisted in fighting. They began dropping their guns, as General Carr had commanded, and raising their hands, their reddened faces turning sullen as they surrendered.

Buffalo Bill Cody was galloping from the front porch, hoping to intercept Baldy Baldwin. Both the Rio Kid and his friend knew how dangerous the leader was, and they had a score to settle with the rangy killer.

"Baldy!" called Pryor again.

Reilly was almost up to the outlaw leader. He was guiding his mustang with one hand and gripping the rein of the led horse with the other. The Rio Kid was aware of Baldwin's stabbing eyes, the insane fury of the outlaw chief as he realized that Pryor would overtake him.

Baldwin whirled, buck teeth bared in a snarl. He shrieked curses at the Rio Kid who had hunted him down, forced him to ruin. His bullet sang within an inch of Bob Pryor's head. The Rio Kid then raised his thumb from his Colt's hammer.

Cody fired a wink later. Baldwin was hit. He stayed where he was for a moment, bent almost double as though looking at something on the ground. His gun arm had fallen and a small stain showed between his green eyes. Buffalo Bill's slug hit him in the side and slowly Baldy Baldwin toppled, lay there with his legs drawn up. The Rio Kid trotted over to check.

Bullhead Reilly, seeing his leader fall, dropped the spare mustang's reins and pivoted to run for it. But he was too late. Lease Ward, Joe Haskins and Buffalo Bill threw lead after the bearded tough. His horse was hit and crashed, throwing Reilly to the ground. He fell hard, and when he sat up found he was surrounded by gun muzzles. Meekly, the stocky bandit in the blue uniform he had assumed raised his hands.

Bob Pryor made sure of Baldwin. The gunrunner boss was finished.

The shooting had ceased now. Gruff voices sounded as the prisoners were searched and hidden, spare weapons being confiscated by General Carr's troopers. Lieutenant Eggleston was standing near the general and Carr put an affectionate arm across the young officer's shoulders.

The Rio Kid and Buffalo Bill Cody rolled smokes and walked around, making sure all was shipshape. Carr had ordered the captives placed in a nearby corral, with armed soldiers guarding them.

Carolyn and her mother, Buddy and other children, emerged from the ranchhouse. For the first time since Baldy Baldwin and Teton River Cal Doak had turned their attention on them, the ranchers could relax.

THE BUSY women had served breakfast—fried meat and gravy, homemade bread and hot coffee, molasses and preserves. After the repast, there was a gathering in the living room. General Carr, Lease Ward, the Rio Kid and Buffalo Bill, Joe Haskins, Captain Trevers and Lieutenant Eggleston, were among the group.

"I'm glad to get my hands on those rascals," said Carr. "The Missouri will be a lot safer with them behind bars. Baldwin and Doak have raised havoc in this district. They've already done a great deal of damage and there's no saying how far it may go, but they won't arm any more Indians. Mister Haskins, I'm very sorry to hear you lost your home."

"We hope to make up for it, and more, General," replied Haskins.

"That's right," grinned Lease Ward. "Looks like we're rich!"

"I heard about that," nodded General Carr. "Rio Kid, Cody told me what you had discovered."

"I reckon you could say that Bullhead Reilly and others of Cal Doak's band did the discovering," Pryor answered. "We found a chunk of gold on Reilly and figured it out. One day, right after the lieutenant was hurt, we were hiding on Split Mountain. Doak and Reilly came along with some of their gunhands, hunting us. They stopped to water their horses and scooped up some for themselves. Reilly noticed something gleaming and picked a nugget of placer gold from the gravel of the stream bed. He showed it to Doak and they all got ex-

cited and hunted around, found more grains and small nuggets in the sand.

"Some of Doak's riders are ex-miners, and the stuff is easy to identify," he went on. "Doak reported to Baldy. They checked further on the creek and knew they had hit a big strike. So Baldwin set about driving out Ward and Haskins in order to clinch his title to their lands. Besides the gold itself, claims would be worth a fortune when the rush began. Baldy didn't expect much of a fuss getting shut of the ranchers."

"But he failed to take you into account, Rio Kid." General Carr's shrewd eyes twinkled. He rose. "Mister Ward, I thank you and your good wife for all your hospitality. It's been a pleasure, but duty calls and we must move back. I'll take along the prisoners and make sure justice is done."

"Thank you, general," said Ward gratefully. "You certainly saved our bacon!"

Eggleston spoke up. "Sir, I'm ready for duty."

Carr looked at the young officer. Then he glanced at Carolyn Ward, standing in the connecting doorway, and he frowned.

"Lieutenant, I admire your zeal," he said. "But you're in no condition for active duty and hard riding. Remain here and gather strength. Report to me within two weeks, when you are more fit."

Carolyn's smile was Carr's reward. He saluted the pretty girl gallantly, bowing low, admiration in his gaze.

Buffalo Bill Cody was leaving with Carr, but the Rio Kid and Mireles intended to remain for a short time at the LW Ranch.

* * * * *

Bob Pryor and Celestino Mireles stood at the rail of the *Great Western* as the chugging sternwheeler slid downstream from Fort Benton. The mighty Missouri River, rolled muddily under them. Smoke poured from the blackened stack, sparks flying high into the clean air. The captain and pilot were alert for snags and new silt banks in the twisting channel ahead.

The boat was loaded with freight, hides and other products of the Frontier. Among the passengers were miners on their way home after hard years in the gold camps, missionaries, soldiers and army wives, gamblers and others.

"I'm glad Buffalo Bill and General Carr caught Mulehide Si," remarked the Rio Kid. "He was a mean little cuss."

He had winged Latham and had warned Cody to watch for the man when he passed through Fort Benton. And on reaching the settlement, Pryor had been informed that Mulehide had been arrested lying up in a room behind the Palace Saloon.

Pleasant thoughts raced through just before the *Great Western* had sailed from Benton.

"She chose Eggleston, and he's a mighty fine young hombre, Celestino." One of the missionaries on the boat had married Carolyn Ward to the lieutenant that morning. "I'm sorry for Long Lew, though. He was loco over her. He told me he was heading back to Texas. Well, that's the way it goes."

"*Si, si,*" agreed Mireles.

In the pen at the steamer's bow were Saber and the paint horse. The scouts were on their way to the Yellowstone.

"I wonder how Custer and Terry will make out?" said the Rio Kid. "I hope we get there in time for the fight."

The wild trails were calling the Rio Kid and his Mexican *compadre*. Soon they would be on horse again, driving hard on the dangerous Frontier, challenging man and Nature alike when they stepped out of bounds.

FEATURED NEXT ISSUE

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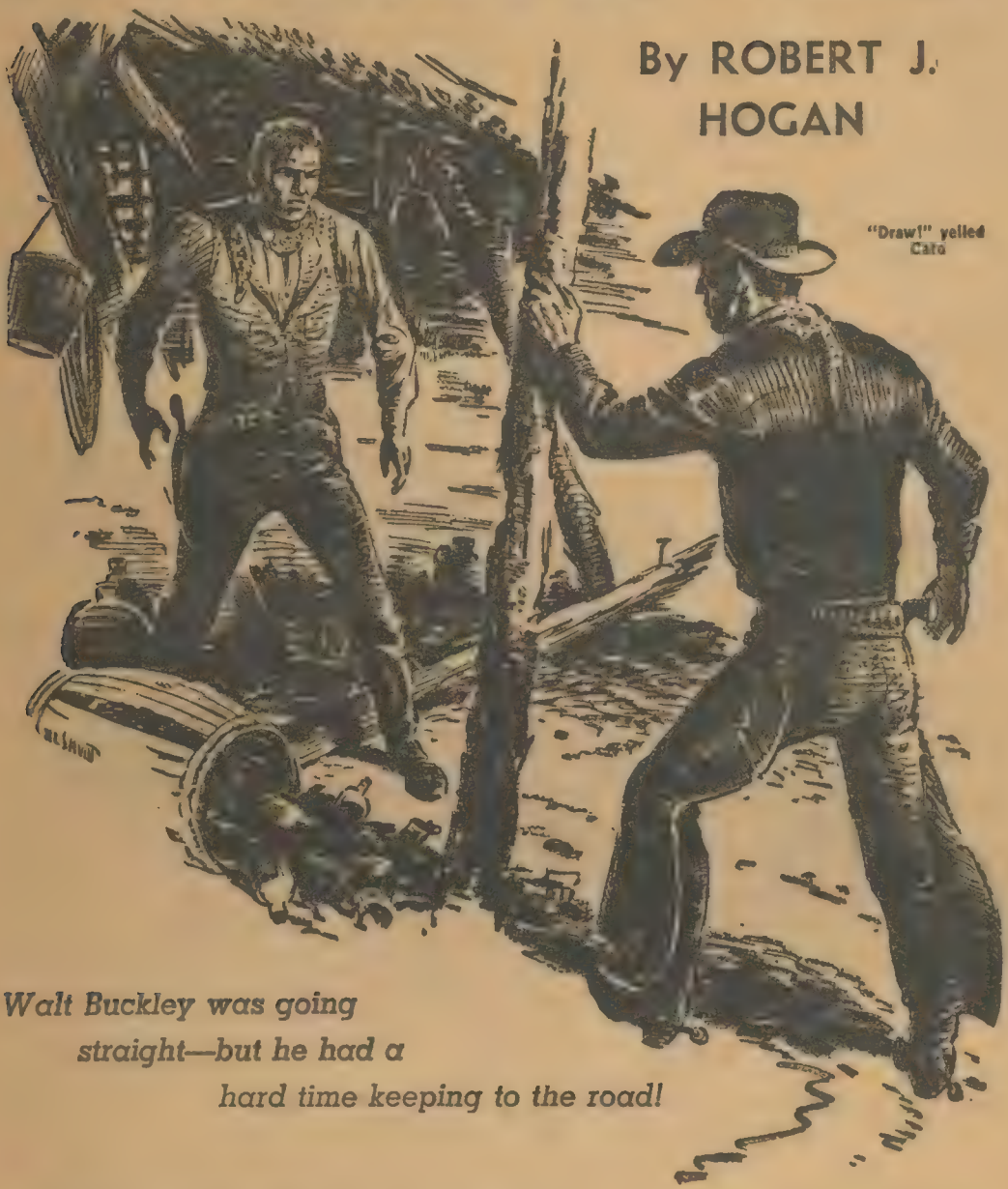
RED TRAIL OF NO RETURN

An Exciting Bob Pryor Novel by JOSEPH CHADWICK

# SURRENDER, HELL!

By ROBERT J. HOGAN




*Walt Buckley was going straight—but he had a hard time keeping to the road!*

LITTLE Walt Buckley, Junior, lay kicking up his bare toes and cooing at his father. Walt Senior, dangled the leg thongs of his six-gun holster for the baby to play with. "Now you behave yourself," he said, "while I'm gone for a few days taking the cattle up into summer range. Don't you go shooting up any Indians while I'm gone, Nubs."

Little Nubs giggled and kicked and waved his chubby arms.

Walt Buckley straightened and strapped on his gun belt. He turned away from the crib and saw Belle, his wife, standing in the doorway.

There had always been a ghost of fear haunting Walt since the old days; since the days when he'd gone straight and married Belle Boyd. And the fear of being hunted always came back as his first thought when trouble from outside loomed.

"What's wrong, Belle?" He tried to keep his voice calm as he studied her face. Usually serene and lovely, now that face was drawn and suddenly tense, like it had been the time the law came riding to question Walt about the bank holdup down at Eli Junction. Of course, he'd proved that he couldn't have been there, but you never could tell what a sheriff or a jury might decide to do. It was always a strain. Now Belle was looking the same way.

"Walt—" she said, and stopped just like she had then. "Walt, there's a posse of riders coming over the ridge—heading this way."

They went over into the other room and looked through the front window. Walt could see the little tail of dust even before he spotted the posse.

"It isn't fair," Belle said. "You've been living as honestly as any man could, since—since the old days. But every time something happens and they can't find who did it right off they head for you."

"Might not be that at all," Walt said, patting her shoulder. "Law's got to take its course and I reckon it's natural to suspect somebody that's slipped before."

"But you paid for your wrongdoing in jail," Belle said. "Why can't they leave you alone?"

He would have liked to think that the posse didn't necessarily have to be headed his way. But since the ridge trail they rode led only to the little Bar 7 ranch where Walt and Belle Buckley ranched on shares, there wasn't any other place the riders could be going. "I reckon it's mighty hard to believe a man has turned straight unless they find some definite proof of it," he said to Belle. "And that ain't easy, I don't guess."

The posse came out of the jack-pine grove over in the sand piece and came into view a couple hundred yards before the house, and now Walt and his wife could see them clearly.

"That's Sheriff Moran with Gord Larkin in the lead," Walt said low. "And that's Brace Holcom and Hank Dixon behind."

"There can't be anything wrong," Belle said tremulously.

"I been trying to think," Walt said. "I can't figure anything. Now I'll go out and talk to them and you stay here."

She shook her head. "I'll go with you," she insisted. Belle had been that way ever since she'd married him, knowing his past.

It hadn't been such a terrible past, at that. Walt Buckley and Cato Lane had been a couple of pretty wild bucks as kids. They'd done a little drinking and wild riding and a little ruckus here and there until they'd got caught trying to hold up the Buckhorn bank. They'd been pretty young then and only got three years apiece. Afterward, they got jobs on Belle Boyd's old man's ranch and they both courted Belle. Then Cato had gone wild in town one night and had run over into the next state, and Walt had married Belle.

SHERIFF Moran was a knotty little man with broad shoulders and a round, cannon ball-shaped head. He had dark beady eyes that could probe into a man's soul.

The three others were big men, sitting tall in their saddles. They all looked at Walt Buckley as he came out of the cabin to greet them. Sheriff Moran waved a hand in the air. He called, "Howdy, Walt," and reined his sorrel gelding.

Buckley forced a smile. He said, "You couldn't have picked a nicer morning for a visit, Sheriff. What's wrong?"

Sheriff Moran got down stiff-legged, stretched his back a little. The others dismounted, ground-reined their horses.

"Nothing wrong about you, the Sheriff said. "We come up to ask a favor of you, Walt."

Walt could feel Belle beside him. She leaned closer to him, touched his hand.

"What favor?" Walt said guardedly.

"Would you want to talk everything over with your woman in on the deal?" Gord Larkin asked.

Buckley nodded. "She's in on everything," he said. "She knows everything that ever happened to me, I reckon."

"She knows about Cato Lane, then, naturally," Sheriff Moran said.

"I should," Belle said, standing

straight and on her own now. "I went with both Cato and Walt when they worked on my father's ranch."

"Your dad took a mighty big chance, I always figured, taking a couple of wild Indian jailbirds to his ranch and letting 'em associate with his daughter," Hank Dixon said.

Hank was one of those hard, raw-boned men who never saw much good in anybody anyway.

Belle and Walt stood silently, not saying a word.

Sheriff Moran turned and looked at Dixon. "I reckon them remarks was uncalled for, Hank," he said. "We come to ask Walt Buckley a favor and not insult him."

Walt could hear Belle's sigh of relief.

Sheriff Moran was looking at Walt Buckley again with his penetrating black eyes.

"It's about Cato that we've come," he said.

"What about Cato?" Walt asked.

"There was a stage holdup couple days ago down near Cherokee Hole. Cato thought he'd killed both the driver and the guard but the guard lived to describe him. It was Cato, all right. Couldn't miss that handsome face and his straw-colored hair. We got Cato holed up in a miner's shack back in the Bowie Hills. He says he'll surrender to nobody but you, Walt, so we came to bring you."

Walt Buckley stared through the sheriff and his men. He could feel Belle's arm against his again, as if she needed support. Her head was bowed.

"What you figure to do to him if I can bring him out unarmed?" Walt said at last.

"Hang him!" Hank Dixon barked. "What do you expect we'll do, kiss him?"

Sheriff Moran gave Dixon a warning glance. "We figure to give him a fair trial by jury," he said to Buckley. "Since I've been the law in this country I've tried to run things legal."

"You've done all right," Walt Buckley admitted. He paused, looked sidewise at Belle.

Belle returned his glance trustingly. "You do—whatever you figure is the right thing, Walt," she said and turned suddenly to hurry into the house.

Walt faced the sheriff. "Cato can do some crazy things," he said. "I've seen him change his mind quick as anything after he'd made it up one way or another."

"You figure he might not surrender to you when you got there?"

"I don't," Walt said. "I'm trying to figure out what his object in sending for me might be. Cato never liked to put anything off."

"Like getting hung, maybe?" Hank Dixon ventured.

Walt frowned. "Maybe." Then he turned. "I'll be out in a little while. You wait for me and I'll go with you."

Belle was there when he came in. Her face was white. "You going, Walt?"

"I reckon so,"

"I don't trust Cato," she said in a sudden outburst. "I know I went out with him to a couple of dances and things but I—I wouldn't trust him—with you."

Walt's hand moved closer to his single six-gun. "I can take care of myself, Belle," he said. He tried to make a low laugh sound reassuring.

"Cato's always held it against us that we married."

Walt thought it over. "I couldn't say for sure," he said. "Of course he raved some when he first heard, but he didn't figure out anything to do about it."

"He asked for you this time," Belle persisted. "He knows he's going to get caught eventually, and he might figure to kill you—if he still feels like that."

WALT rubbed the sweating palm of his right hand on his overalls. "I got to take that chance, Belle. Don't forget Cato saved my life back when we were kids."

Belle's sigh was loud in the stillness of the house. "All right," she said resignedly. Then, after a long pause, "I think I'll go with you. If Cato's got a crazy streak on I might be able to help talk some sense into his head."

"No," said Walt. "You'd better not go along. But there is one thing you can do. Is there any of that chocolate cake we had for supper last night left in the cupboard?"

Her face lighted. "I think there's almost three quarters left," she said. "That's right. Cato always liked my chocolate cake."

"I think he'd appreciate it a heap, Belle. He used to say there was nobody could cook like you could. I remember

he said once he'd marry you for your cooking if you was the homeliest woman in the world."

"I'll get the cake and wrap it up," Belle said, hurrying to the kitchen.

Her husband followed her. "Besides," he went on, "Cato was always a heap more agreeable on a full stomach. I don't reckon he's had anything to eat for a considerable spell if they've had him on the run since the stage holdup. Maybe if I was to slice some of that venison steak you could put it into a sandwich with some thick sweet butter the way he used to like it."

"All right," she said.

Walt got out the venison steak and began whittling small slices off the thick steak, cutting on the diagonal.

The front door opened and heavy boots sounded.

"Walt?"

"Back here, Sheriff," he answered.

"You'd think he could trust you for a few minutes," Belle said under her breath.

"We're getting some food to take Cato," Walt called to him. "He's more reasonable on a full stomach."

The sheriff strolled in as Walt was wrapping the cake in a buckskin. "Mind letting me see that before you wrap it up?"

Walt opened the package, let the sheriff examine it. Moran nodded. "Like to make sure," he said and straightened up again.

Belle was standing before him, fire in her eyes and a brittle ring in her voice. "I can talk straight to you, Sheriff Moran," she began. "I never was in jail. If you ask me, you've got plenty of nerve to come and ask Walt a favor and then watch everything he does in getting ready." Her voice raised with her anger. "Will there ever come a time when you'll trust him without asking questions?"

The sheriff didn't answer that. He simply said, "I'm sorry, Belle."

Moran went out and a minute or so later Walt came out carrying the food. He stowed it in two saddle bags, saddled up and reined his bay around to join the others.

As they started off down the trail, Walt looked back to see Belle standing in the doorway with little Nubs in her arms. They were both waving to him.

"You got a mighty fine woman there, Walt," Moran said. "I'm sorry I mistrusted you, at least letting her see that I did."

Walt didn't answer, and a little farther on Moran made another observation.

"Maybe I've misjudged you, Walt. But it's mighty hard to trust a man completely when he's made one bad mistake like you did and got caught at it."

"What I always say," Hank Dixon horned in. "If a man can go crazy once and hold up a bank, he can do it again."

Nobody said anything to that and they rode on in silence for some time. Then Moran, who was riding in the lead with Buckley, said, "Walt, I got to admit that so far as I know you've never done nothing out of the way since you got out of jail."

"Thanks for admitting it public," Walt said bitterly. "Not that I blame you, Moran. I don't reckon anybody ever gets trusted after they've made a bad slip."

"And I want you to know I appreciate you coming along to help us take Cato Lane," the sheriff added. "You're likely saving a life or two."

Walt was wondering what Cato would say when he walked in with the cake and the sandwich. He was wondering a lot of things about Cato. He hadn't seen him in several years, and it would be hard to face him, as things were, knowing that Cato was going to die for his crime eventually, if not sooner. They'd had some mighty good times together when they were kids on the loose.

About noon the sheriff asked Walt if he wanted to stop for some chow, and Walt told him he wasn't hungry, that he'd rather get this thing over first.

They rode on without talking after that.

It was early afternoon when Sheriff Moran pointed out the shack on a small bench half way up Spider Mountain in the Bowie Hills.

"That's where he is," the sheriff told him.

Walt studied the situation. He said, "You got him in a good open place to watch. How many men you got around there?"

"About a dozen altogether."

"You must have holed him up there in the dark," Walt ventured.

"About a half hour after it got dark last night," said Moran.

THEY drew up in a low swale and a small, agile man came toward them afoot. Walt recognized him as Charlie Acker, the hotel proprietor.

"Good you come, Buckley," said the man. "I think Lane figured you was letting him down. He's been getting more abusive last couple of hours."

"He hasn't tried to make a break?" Moran asked.

Acker shook his head. "He knows he's going to die but he ain't eager to die that quick, I reckon."

The sheriff got down, beckoned to Buckley. "We got our horses over in the pines. Charlie'll take care of yours. You ready to go see Cato now?"

Walt nodded, took his packages out of the saddle bags.

They started up the hill afoot, topped a little rise and stopped.

"This is as far as I go with you," Moran said.

From where they stood, sheltered from view in a clump of cedar, they could see the cabin a little farther up the mountain. Suddenly a husky voice bellowed from the shack—Cato Lane's voice—raw from yelling threats.

"If that son, Buckley, don't come before dark, I'm coming out and you can go to blazes at the end of my guns! I'm shooting my way clear, or I die trying!"

Walt Buckley stepped out of the growth and called back to him.

"I'm here, Cato. Take a look in front of the cedar brake and you'll see me." He watched the cabin. There was no sign of any movement but Cato's voice sounded almost instantly.

"Cursed if you didn't come, you hook-nosed bustard," he yelled. "Come on up here before I lose my voice from hollering at them law varmints."

"I'm coming," Buckley said, starting to walk, and he added, "I got something for you, Cato." That would keep him curious so he wouldn't start shooting on the way up, anyway.

He started up the slag spill that ran rough up to the bench where the shack was. Keeping his eyes on the shuttered and barricaded cabin, Walt knew Cato was watching him with those pale blue eyes of his, eyes that could stare with a burning intensity. And as he walked, he thought about what Belle had said. Maybe Cato did want to get him up there to get even with him for marrying her. A man like Cato could hold a grudge forever.

He climbed the steeper rise to the level bench and walked across the wild grass in front of the cabin.

"Go around to the back," Cato called.

Walt did so. The back door opened and he stepped in without any physical hesitation. The door closed and a timber dropped into place.

The inside of the cabin was almost dark, what with all the openings boarded up, and it took Walt a little time to accustom his eyes to the dimness. Cato moved about before him as a tall shadow. Then he became more plain, a tall man with his shock of hair still straw-colored and his features even and handsome. He had the same weak chin with some whisker stubble covering it. He was standing with his feet wide apart, hands on the stocks of his twin forty-fives, and a grin on his face.

"What you got for me, Walt?" he said then.

"Some food Belle put up for you. We figured you'd be hungry."

Cato stuck out his great hands and Walt put the food into them. He said, "Eat hearty, Cato. Some of the things you're special fond of, we figured."

Cato dropped the food on the crude table, opened it hungrily and tore off a piece of the cake first. "Belle's chocolate cake," he said. "I'd sure know that anywhere."

"I sliced some venison," Walt said, "and she made you a sandwich."

Cato nodded and stuffed food in his mouth. "Eat hearty, for tomorrow you die. Eh, Walt?"

"I didn't mean that."

"Sure you didn't," Cato said. "You're a pretty good bustard, you are, Walt. Only trouble with you, you married the girl I was in love with."

There it was. Walt stood motionless, his arms at his sides, his feet braced a little, not knowing what was coming—never sure what might come from Cato.

The murderer turned suddenly and pointed half the sandwich at him. "I never forgave you for that, Walt, marrying my girl. You know that?"

"I was never sure how you felt," Walt said. "I haven't seen much of you since Belle and I were married."

Cato wolfed at the cake, devoured the rest of the sandwich.

Walt said, "They told me you wanted to surrender to me, Cato."

Cato turned, stared at him with his mouth full. "You believe that? Surrender, hell! I surrender to no man!"

"You didn't tell them that, then?" Walt asked.

Cato laughed. "Sure I told 'em that. I wanted to get you up here. A man likes to see his friends before he dies. Reckon you're the only friend I got, Walt, so I wanted to see you. Then, a man sometimes has some scores to settle too."

A COLD sweat broke out on Walt Buckley's forehead. He glanced at Cato's twin six-guns, wondered what he should do—and he thought about Belle and little Nubs. Cato had always been a faster man on the draw than he. Cato had always been trigger happy and accurate as a striking rattlesnake.

"I got some things to take care of before I die," Cato said. "One thing, I'll never get over loving your wife. I ain't been much since I was born, Walt, but Belle liking me once and going out with me, I reckon that's about the best thing that ever happened to me. I'd like to do something for her."

"How?" Walt's voice had a hollow sound.

Cato shrugged, stuffed the rest of the sandwich in his mouth and reached for what was left of the cake. "One way or another. I reckon part of it may be up to you. But one way or another it'll do her some good."

There wasn't any use asking him more now. Cato was in a teasing mood. Walt stood motionless, waiting for what might come.

Cato wolfed the rest of the cake, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "We had some darn good times together, Walt," he said. "Ever forget when we was kids and rode down to Calabos one day and tipped over every barrel of potatoes and peas and beans and stuff that the little storekeeper had along the counter of his general store? Ever forget the expression on his face? And him flying around like a brood hen spreading her chicks before a hawk and not knowing which way to turn?" Cato slapped his thigh and doubled over with laughter.

Walt knew he could draw and shoot right now and he would likely get Cato before he himself was hit. But he couldn't do that. The whole thing didn't make sense. He wouldn't take advantage that way; on the other hand, there was Belle and little Nubs to think about.

Cato was still laughing as he straightened up, but it was a strained laughter. Then he sobered. "And speaking of face expressions," he went on, "I'll never forget how you looked going down in that quicksand before I got you out. You looked funny enough when you first got stuck, but when you went down almost to your ears—" he started to laugh again—"with your big wide ears sticking out and your mouth open yelling bloody murder and me pushing that dried out cedar log to help you—"

"I've always been grateful to you for saving my life, Cato," Walt put in. "I sure thought I was a goner."

"Hell, I wouldn't let a pal die like that," said Cato. "'Course, if it was you or me, shooting it out in my own defense, that might be different."

"What you talking about, Cato?"

"Just saying that would be another case," Cato said. A crafty look came into his flat, pale, fish eyes. "But I got something else to talk about. And this is the main reason why I brought you up here." He walked around taking squints through tiny openings in the shutters. Then he came back, stood facing Buckley, hands on his hips. In a low voice he said, "What I want to tell you most, is where the gold is off the coach. I got that hid where they'll never find it."

Walt shook his head. "I'm straight, Cato. I don't want any part of it."

"Sure," Cato gritted. "You're straight. I've been hearing. But they don't let you stay straight. They come blaming every holdup on you if they can't stick it on somebody else. Ain't that the truth?"

"That's got nothing to do with what we're talking about."

"You can't fool me," said Cato. "I know. I've heard and watched. And I'm giving you a chance to fix things so everything'll be all right. Knowing where this gold is hid'll fix everything."

"I ain't touching the gold," Walt said again.

Cato's eyes narrowed dangerously. "Curse you, you're listening to me, or I'm drawing on you before I figured. Shut up your mouth and listen. I'm going to die, so the gold ain't going to do me no good. But I'd like to see Belle get some good out of it, understand?"

Walt didn't answer.

"Remember that cave where we used to hide when we was kids, pretending we was gunslicks with the law watching for us?" Cato said, almost in a whisper. "Recollect that loose stone in the wall where we'd hide stuff, food we'd swiped and stuff?"

Walt nodded automatically.

"That's where the gold is, behind that rock. Two sacks of it." Suddenly the man's face darkened and he stepped back. "Well, I done my good deed. That's over. Now I'm getting even with you for marrying my girl!"

The change was unbelievable. It was as though Cato were two different people, one good and the other evil. He stood with his hands out a little and partly raised.

"I'm going to let you draw first, Walt," he said. "You're slower than me. That's the only way it would be fair. Reach for your iron!"

A million thoughts burned through Buckley's brain. Belle and Nubs and the gold and the ranch. The love of life and the look on Cato's mean face, and those hands extended mockingly, giving his old partner first chance at the draw.

"You're crazy, Cato," Walt rasped, his voice taut.

"Maybe so. Draw, you yellow bustard!"

"I got nothing against you," Walt said. "This is the job for the law and I'm not the law."

"The devil take the law!" Cato yelled. "No law is ever going to kill me. Draw!"

Walt stood ready, but shook his head.

"You white-livered skunk," Cato gritted. "So that's what marriage does to a man. Makes him soft, does it? Makes a chicken out of him. Well, I'm glad I never married, then, you blasted coward!" And he raked Walt with vile names and threats.

Suddenly his hands flew to his guns. He drew them like a man gone mad, flashing them up with fire spewing from the muzzles before they were high enough to kill.

Walt Buckley drew too. His one gun came out and fired after several shots had rung from Cato's guns. The killer's guns were firing point-blank at Buckley now, and Walt could feel the burn on his neck and a sting at his ear lobe.

There was no time to think, no time for anything but the law of self preservation to work against a madman. Walt Buckley drilled two shots into Cato at close range and the towheaded outlaw fell forward, crashed to the dirt floor of the shack and never moved a muscle.

BUCKLEY stood staring at what he had done. His mind was numb from the tautness of his nerves and the suddenness of the whole affair.

He was standing like that with his smoking gun in his hand when Sheriff Moran came bellowing up the hill toward the shack. It seemed as though voices came from all directions, demanding to know what was going on. A gun boomed and a bullet crashed through a shutter close to Walt.

Walt shook his head, straightened. "You can come on in. It's all over. Cato Lane's—dead."

Removing the barricades, he opened the front door and the sheriff and his men poured in. Moran looked at the body of the outlaw sprawled on the floor

[Turn page]

AMAZING THING! By Cooper
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in a pool of his own blood.

"That was a good job, Walt," he commended. "You sure saved the law a lot of trouble. We had him dead to rights. He couldn't have got out of a hanging."

Walt stood silently staring down at Cato.

He was thinking of the times they rode and ate and slept together. The time when Cato had saved his life.

As the men prepared to take the body down to Boothill, Sheriff Moran came over to Walt again.

"Walt, you've done a good job and for that I'm going to pin an honorary deputy badge on you."

Walt Buckley shook his head. "I wouldn't feel right about it. Now that I got time to think it over, I wouldn't feel good about it at all. You see, I figure Cato asked me up here to kill him."

"What you mean?"

Walt pointed to his ear lobe and the scratch on his neck.

"Cato did that," he said. "But I wasn't sure how much more he was going to do and there wasn't time to think and I couldn't see any sense of my dying just because Cato had gone crazy." He bowed his head a little, then shook it gently. "But now that I've had a minute or two to think, Cato wasn't so crazy, I reckon. He said the law wasn't going to kill him and I guess that's the story. He asked me to come up and do it. And that's why I wouldn't want to accept a badge, thanks just the same, Sheriff."

"What makes you so sure Cato planned it this way?" Sheriff Moran asked.

Walt pointed to the bullet nicks. "Cato shot at least twice at me, point-blank, before I could get the first slug out of my gun. Cato can shoot better than that. He could have put both slugs through my heart, now that I think of it, if he'd wanted to."

Silently they all filed out of the shack and mounted. Then Walt Buckley said, "There's one more thing I'd like to show you, Sheriff." And he led the lawman toward the old cave where Cato and he had played as kids. On the way he said, "Cato told me where he'd hid the gold from the stage holdup. Maybe you can help me figure out something."

When they reached the cave, they worked their way into the dark rock cleft and found the two sacks of gold behind the loose rock just as Cato had said. Taking it outside the sheriff tucked it into his saddle bags and they mounted again.

"What was it you wanted me to help you figure out, Walt?" Moran asked him as they rode down the trail.

"What Cato meant when he told me where the gold was hidden. He said he wanted to do something for Belle, and telling me where the gold was would maybe make her happy one way or another. I can't make that out, Sheriff. That one way or another angle."

They rode for a long time in silence, then the sheriff reined his horse off the main trail and headed southwest.

"You're heading up for the Bar 7 ranch, Sheriff, in case you didn't know," Walt told him. "I appreciate you riding home with me but it ain't really necessary."

"I'm riding you home," Moran said, "because that Cato wasn't so crazy after all, maybe."

WALT looked over at the sheriff, puzzled.

"I don't get what you mean."

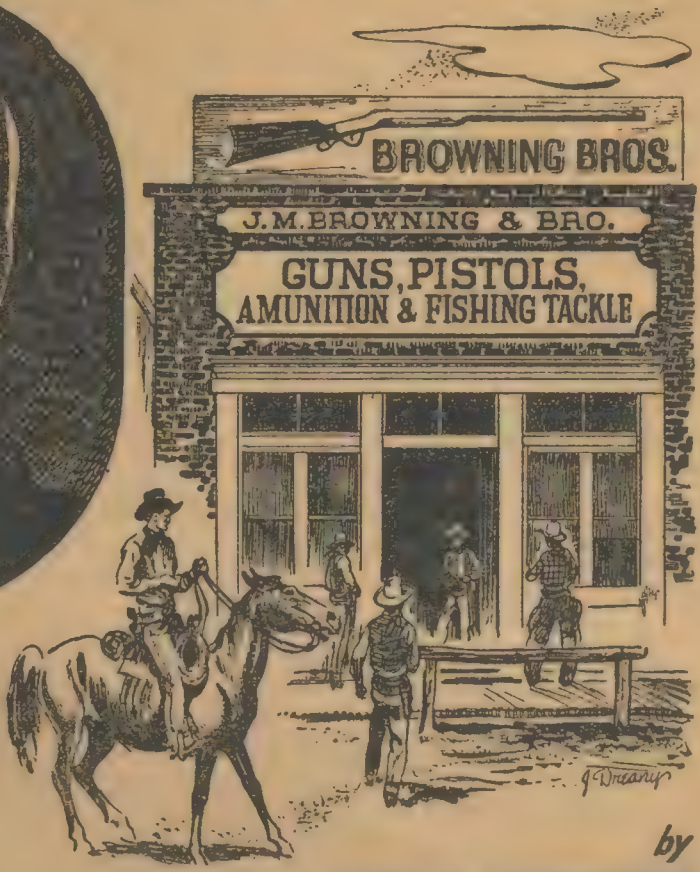
"I figure that Cato saying 'one way or another' meant something like this," Moran explained. "If you was to not say anything about that gold until the whole thing died down, then you could go to the cave and get it and you and Belle could move out of here. You could go some place where you wasn't known and buy yourselves a nice spread and have a completely new start in life where nobody would have any doubts about you."

"But I been trying to tell you, Sheriff Moran," Walt said earnestly. "I'm living straight and I wouldn't have no interest in money that I hadn't made fair and honest."

"I'm sure of that now," the sheriff said, smiling over at him. "That's maybe what Cato meant by saying 'or another.' You turning all this gold over, without even a question, proves to me, and it will to everybody else, that you can be trusted beyond a doubt. And the reason I'm heading for the Bar 7 is because I'm going to be mighty proud telling Belle what you've done about the gold. I mean to tell her that I hope to get struck dead if I ever have the slightest doubt about Walt Buckley ever again."

# GUN TITAN of the WEST

JOHN M. BROWNING




*When better guns were made, John Browning made them!*

*by* **JOHN A. THOMPSON**

MILITARY experts know all about John Browning. The semi-automatic sidearms police officers handle so efficiently in maintaining law and order in our crowded cities are most likely to be Browning designed products. Hunters and sportsmen using modern sporting rifles are apt to be profiting from Browning's positive genius.

From tiny pocket pistols to machine-guns and all the stops in between, John Moses Browning of Ogden, Utah, was perhaps the most prolific inventor of successful firearms who ever lived. Browning himself was a product of the West, born there when the West needed guns—and used them high, wide and fancy.

John Browning's shop and arms factory in Ogden, Utah, a little two-story brick building that advertised, "J. M. Browning & Bro. Guns, Pistols, Amunition & Fishing Tackle" became the Mecca to which gun manufacturers from all over the country came to see the latest "Browning improvements" in firearms, and more often than not to buy the rights to using his patents back in their factories in the East.

Though many enticing offers were

**A TRUE STORY OF INVENTIVE GENIUS!**

dangled in front of him, John Browning preferred to remain for most of his years in Utah where there was "room to breathe" beneath the West's sunny skies, and he could go hunting and fishing—and keep on inventing gun improvements in his shop above the store in Ogden. Aside from being an inventive genius, John Browning knew the things in life that really counted.

*Prepare for Opening*

When John and his brother Matt opened their first store back in the 1880's, they decided that 600 rifles—all hand-made Browning rifles—would be a reasonable stock to begin with. So in the shop upstairs and with the help of their half-brothers, "Ed" and "Sam" Browning the four of them set to work. The job took a long time, probably several years. Despite requests in the interim from eager purchasers that they sell at least a few of their guns, John remained adamant.

"Sorry," he told everybody. "Browning Brothers isn't ready for gun business yet. Wait till we open up."

Then almost the day they opened they had an unexpected visitor from the East. He was Thomas G. Bennett, at that time active head of the fast-growing Winchester Repeating Arms Company, in New Haven, Connecticut. The story is that when Bennett arrived in Utah after his long journey West he was at first a bit chagrined to find the Browning "factory" such a dingy looking place, and more so to find nobody in the store downstairs at the time, and the place apparently deserted.

After cooling his heels awhile, and probably counting ten to control his impatience, he mounted the wooden steps to the shop. Save for one lone youngster tinkering with a gun part at a lathe, the shop too was empty.

"Young man," snapped Bennett—after all the head of Winchester was accustomed to something more cordial in the way of receptions—"I've come all the way from New England to see Mr. John Browning. Can you tell me where I can find him."

The young man looked up from his lathe, set aside the piece of gun mechanism he was working on, and there was a quiet twinkle in his eyes as he turned toward the visitor.

"Why yes," he said. "I'm John Browning. What can I do for you, Mr. Bennett?"

Browning wiped his hand on his trouser leg, and the two shook hands. Before their talk was over Bennett had not only bought the 600 Browning rifles, but also the patent rights to future manufacture of the guns under the Winchester name at New Haven. This was the beginning of a long association of the two.

Later Bennett tried hard to induce Browning to join the Winchester organization. But John Browning, always a man of his own mind, insisted on staying in Utah. He did, however, for many years make an annual, and usually as brief as possible, trip to New Haven to bring in his latest improvements in rifle design and see them safely under way. Then he boarded the first train again for home and Utah where he could work undisturbed for months on end in his own gun shop, and go fishing and hunting when he pleased or had the time.

When Bennett (just to go into a bit of American rifle history for a minute) made his first trek to the Browning store in Ogden for Winchester, the Winchester Repeating Arms Company had never made a single-shot rifle. Moreover the repeating rifles on which the firm was basing its reputation, while good guns, were not suited for using the long heavily-powered cartridges that other rifles of the day—the Sharps for instance—handled. And high-powered rifles whether for big game, buffalo, or hostile Indians were virtually a must in the taming and conquering of the pioneer West.

What Winchester needed for the vast Western market was a rifle with greater fire power. And John Browning's hand-made rifles, designed by a young Western pioneer gun-maker and geared to Western needs, had just that. They could handle any heavy cartridge the Sharps could handle. And were, moreover, a better job of gun designing.

For example the hammer of Browning's rifle was not set on the outside of the frame, like the old percussion guns—and the Sharps hammer was. Instead it was hung so that the firing-pin moved in a straight line in the axis of the bore and not around a couple of corners as the Sharps firing-pin did.

Winchester made this first Browning rifle for 35 years. Under the Winchester

imprint it saw yeoman service throughout the West—and the world for that matter—and became one of the most famous single-shot rifles ever made. John Browning designed it when he was about 24 years old.

Browning also designed a repeating rifle that looked much like a Winchester Model 1873. It was lever-action and carried its cartridges in a tube under the barrel, but the mechanism, with its solidly locking breech, was a tremendous improvement. The gun was strong enough to take any cartridge fire-power made at the time, even the army's bone-blasting .45-70 cartridge.

### *Browning Sells Improved Rifle*

There doesn't seem to be any public record of what Winchester paid for this repeater. Neither Bennett nor Browning were ever over-talkative about their private business affairs. The price has been guessed at as $10,000. If so, or even if it was five times that much, it was a bargain for Winchester. One rival rifle manufacturer of the period is said to have remarked to Browning later that he would have given "half his factory" for it.

Winchester began making the repeater in 1885, made the rifle for 50 years, and does today in a slightly modified form as the Model 71. It's still a honey. Chambered for the .348 Win. cartridge, the Model 71 is a modern lever-action sporting rifle suitable for any North American big game—including Kodiak bears, grizzlies and moose.

Over the 25 years of Browning's association with Winchester, John Browning, the amazing gun designer from the West, designed *eleven* different guns that Winchester put into production and nearly *twenty* others that the company bought but did not produce. Though his visits to New Haven were few and far between, Browning was for many years one of the most valuable assets Winchester ever had.

Moreover, though he possessed a genius for gun design vouchsafed to few at any time, John Moses Browning came more or less naturally by his inventive skill in his chosen field. His father, Jonathan Browning, was a gunsmith before him. John himself was born and reared in the pioneer far West when a man's rifle was his most treasured and necessary possession. It was his meat-getter, his protection from wild animals and more often than not, literally his salvation in the face of marauding hordes of hostile Indians.

John himself lived through the period that saw the old long rifles of the frontiersmen, the powder, cap and ball muzzle loaders give way to the era of repeating rifles using metal-cased cartridges and the modern firearm. In fact his inventions and new gun designs played a great part in bringing about the stupendous change.

John was born in the West because his father, Jonathan Browning, beat Horace Greeley to his sage advice about where young men should go several decades before Horace ever thought of it. A native of Tennessee and a gunsmith in Kentucky before he was 21, Jonathan Browning became a Mormon, joining Brigham Young's famous Mormon colony at Nauvoo, Illinois along about 1840, and established a gun-shop there.

When the Mormons were forced to leave Illinois Jonathan went with them to Iowa. Taking his lathe along with him to Kanesville he again set up shop. Being a firm and early believer in advertising, the following notice, now preserved and treasured in the Browning Company files, appeared under a September 18, 1849, date line in the Kanesville *Frontier Guardian:*

GUNSMITHING

The subscriber is prepared to manufacture, to order, improved Firearms, viz: revolving rifles and pistols; also slide guns, from 5 to 25 shooters. All on an improved plan, and he thinks not equalled this far east. (Farther west they might be.) The emigrating and sporting community are invited to call and examine Browning's improved firearms before purchasing elsewhere. Shop eight miles south of Kanesville on Mosquito Creek, half a mile south of Trading Post.

Jonathan Browning

Jonathan had a sense of humor when he mentioned "farther west." Kanesville, near Council Bluffs, was virtually the frontier. Beyond it westward at the time were only the lush plains that were the home of the buffalo, and warring Indians, and still further on the towering mountains of the Rockies. A few white trappers, descendants of the Mountain Men, still trapped beaver in the lonely, distant places. The rest was wilderness—long miles, hundreds of them stretching out one beyond the

other to the rich but as yet unrealized promise of the western sun.

At Kanesville Jonathan produced two of the very first repeating rifles ever made. One was an attempt to turn the old-fashioned muzzle-loader into a multi-shot gun by means of a sliding bar holding five hand-loads and pushed through an aperture at the breech as the gun was fired. The bar and its magazine of five shots could be loaded in advance.

### *Browning Makes Cylinder Rifle*

The other gun was a rifle with a revolving cylinder somewhat similar to the cylinders on the then new Colt's "revolver." It held six shots, the powder and ball being loaded into each cylinder and a cap placed on each nipple. The gun was cocked by drawing back the hammer which also turned the cylinder to put a fresh load in place, on much the same principle as the single-action revolver.

Both guns were ingenious as early steps in a much needed repeating rifle. Neither, however, proved too practical in action. In fact they were not safe guns to handle. The big drawback was that the flame from one cap might, and too often did jump from the joint at the barrel breech and set off one or more of the adjoining loads. When this happened a man balancing the gun barrel with his extended left hand was likely to catch the bullet or bullets from the exploding chambers somewhere in the arm or the vicinity of his wrist.

Naturally this didn't make the gun too popular with the shooting fraternity, though pioneer gunsmith Jonathan Browning was on the right track in realizing the tremendous advantages of a rifle that would fire more than a single shot without re-loading.

Still intent on gun-making Jonathan moved West to Ogden, Utah, in 1851, and was in fact chosen to captain the covered-wagon train on which he journeyed westward. He set up shop in Ogden in a small frame building, part of which was given over to the family living quarters. It was here that John Moses Browning was born in 1855.

Young John always evinced a keen interest in guns. He grew up in the portentous years of modern rifle development when the muzzle-loader was on the wane. Metallic cartridges were just coming into being. And it was the advent of the metallic cartridge that made the designing of a workable repeating rifle possible.

As a boy John liked to hunt and fish. He was also a great whittler, a famous country art of the pioneer days that has almost vanished from the American scene. At 14 John Browning whittled a breech mechanism of his own design for a rifle out of blocks of wood. Before he was twenty he made his first "John Browning" gun from scraps and parts obtained in his father's shop. The gun was his own pattern, and it was successful. So successful that his proud dad suggested he make another one for his brother Matthew.

This latter gun, Jonathan declared, according to a booklet on Browning guns published by the J. M. and M. S. Browning Company some years ago, was probably the best gun ever seen up to that time on the frontier. It was better, said Jonathan, than any gun he, himself, or anyone he knew, could make. John Browning, not yet 21, a raw-boned frontier-raised youngster had already started on the career that was to make him world famous.

To further John's promising entry into the intricate field of gun designing, Jonathan gave the lad full use of all the machinery in his shop. That meant chiefly the small foot-power lathe that had been hauled across the plains by ox-team.

Jonathan Browning died in 1879, the very year that John Browning obtained from the Patent Office in Washington his first of many subsequent patents on a John Browning designed firearm. The patent was for the gun that became the famous Winchester single-shot rifle.

With the loss of his father, responsibility for providing for the family, and operating the Odgen gunshop fell upon the shoulders of young John Browning and his brother, Matt. In operating the shop they had the assistance of two half brothers, Ed and Sam.

And it was then that John and Matt decided while doing a brisk, frontier business in "amunition," gun repairs and fishing tackle they would wait until they had a backlog of 600 rifles made before starting in to sell John Browning guns. The wait was one of those fateful decisions that probably changed the whole course of Browning's life—and gun history. By the time the 600 guns had been

made Bennett of the great Winchester Repeating Arms Company was out in Ogden making a dicker not only for the entire stock but for John Browning's gun patents as well.

*Browning Begins to Invent Guns*

Browning's ever-restless inventive genius didn't stop with designing rifles. In a way it only started there.

Back in the fall of 1892, John Browning took one of his rifles on a hunt in the marshes near Great Salt Lake. While shooting through the high bulrushes he noticed that whenever he fired a shot the grass was disturbed in a much wider path than the track of the bullet would account for. The phenomenon both puzzled and intrigued him. How come this wide bending of grass when only a small bullet cut through it?

To find out Browning began some experiments when he got back to his shop in Ogden. Taking an iron plate 4 inches square and weighing about 5 pounds, he bored a hole through it more than large enough for a bullet to go through. Then he set up the piece of metal in front of his gun, and pulled the trigger. As he had anticipated the gas pressure following the bullet blew the iron plate several feet from the muzzle of his gun. Quite evidently, as he had already surmised, it was gas pressure that bent the bulrushes in the path of his shots out on the Great Salt Lake marshes.

Incidentally many years later Browning's accurate surmise was definitely proved when high-speed photographs were taken of bullets emerging from the muzzles of fired guns. The pictures showed gas coming out of the muzzle and expanding into a sort of doughnut-shaped ring many times the diameter of the gun bore almost instantaneously.

Browning didn't need the pictures. He was interested in guns—not photographs. And what he had in the back of his mind was the utilization of the power in these waste gases to make workable a gas-operated automatic firearm. Browning did some hunting, some figuring on stray sheets of paper, some whittling—and a whale of a lot of hard thinking. The result was an experimental model of the first gas-operated automatic firearm ever invented. It had a concave cap with a hole in the center fitting directly in front of the muzzle. The cap allowed the gas following the bullet to force the cap forward. A rod beneath the gun-barrel connected the cap with the action. When the gun was fired the cap pulled the rod forward, operated the gun mechanism just as in a hand-operated lever-action gun. But in this case the operation was automatic.

Later Browning decided it was better to take the gas from the barrel through a small hole and use it against a piston connected with the gun's firing mechanism. This is essentially the system widely used today, more than half a century later, in light Browning machine-rifles—and in the famous World War II Garand rifle.

Back in the Spanish-American War, Browning's was the *only* automatic machine-gun used—and used effectively too—by our Army and Navy. In case any of you oldtimers are right now remembering the well-known "Gatling" gun these, if you will recall, were not strictly speaking automatic. They were operated by a hand crank. Moreover they were as heavy as a light field-piece and had to be

[*Turn page*]

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mounted on wheels and hauled into position by horses.

Later Browning developed his famous recoil-operated machine-gun, that was used so effectively by our Doughboys in World War I and with still further improvements in World War II, not only by our Army but by many other combatants as well.

Browning's gun genius was still not satisfied. As long ago as 1897 he produced his first automatic pistol. This time the Belgians heard about it, or were most interested in it first. They sent a man all the way from Liege to Ogden, Utah, to see John Browning. First produced as a vest pocket number, then in larger calibers the Belgian concern, the Fabrique Nationale had made a million Browning pistols at about the time the first World War began.

*Belgian King Decorates Browning*

To commemorate the occasion King Albert, of Belgium, made John Moses Browning, the Western-born and reared gunsmith, a "Chevalier de l'Ordre de Leopold."

That's the highest honor Belgium could bestow on anybody—kings and potentates included.

In this country Colt also made automatic pistols designed by Browning. The famous .45 Colt automatic was adopted by our army in 1911. It is still the regulation pistol of our armed forces.

About the time the Army made the .45 automatic official, Browning made one of his trips East with the plans for an auto-loading shotgun. It embodied many new features. He was proud of it, sure of its success, and he had worked long and hard on designing it. As usual he took the gun to Winchester, for whom he had designed so many successful rifles. But this time, because of the new features involved, instead of selling the gun outright to Winchester as he had done with his earlier rifles, he wanted Winchester simply to produce it and pay him a royalty on the output.

T. C. Bennett, always an astute and able business man—in fact the man who was largely responsible for building Winchester into what it was—couldn't see things that way. He'd buy the gun outright, but he wouldn't pay a royalty to anybody. Not even to his old friend John Browning, whose first 600 Browning rifles he had purchased back in the little Browning shop in Ogden back in the early 1880's.

Browning was just as adamant. No royalty, no new Browning auto-loading shotgun for Bennett. As a result the new gun was snapped up by the Belgians, already making his automatic pistols by the hundreds of thousands. Browning, however, retained the United States rights to his shotgun and continued to invent new guns of all types for the Fabrique Nationale d'Armes de Guerre—to give that famous European arms establishment its full name. Meantime Remington made many of these new guns in the U. S. Colt made most of the automatic pistols and Stevens made a Browning designed hammerless slide or trombone action repeating shotgun.

John Browning, the gun titan of the West, died in 1926 in Liege, Belgium, half way around the world from the shadow of his beloved Wasatch Mountains in Utah. He was in Liege on a business trip. The Fabrique Nationale that had snapped up so many of Browning's gun designs was just putting his latest invention into production, an over and under shotgun.

Nobody knows the whys and wherefores of inventive genius. Or what it is that makes a Tom Edison, or a John Browning tick.

Today nearly a quarter century after John Browning's passing the guns he devised continue to be made, Browning designed rifles, shotguns, automatic pistols, light machine-rifles, machine-guns. In staggering numbers and an almost endless procession they go into the hands of hunters, sportsmen, trappers, police officers and military forces not only in this country, but the world around.

The company John Browning founded carries on. Though it is known now as the J. M. and S. M. Browning Company, its headquarters are still out West in Ogden, Utah, where John Moses Browning fished, hunted—and invented guns.

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# GUADELOUPE GUNFIRE

## By NELS LEROY JORGENSEN

*Back from Mexico comes grim-faced gunfighter Burke Donahue to face rustler vengeance and keep a rendezvous with death!*

FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS, ever since he had ridden off and disappeared from Aguas Ricos to vanish below the Border, there had been talk of Burke Donahue. And when he came back that meant, a lot of them opined, trouble. Trouble always followed him and there was trouble to start with in this strip. Had been.

At first it looked like predictions were justified, after the word

In the doorway of the ruined mission, Tony Donahue was standing, holding a cocked .44

had run up and down the single main street. Burke Donahue, astonishingly tall and burly, had swung himself out of the saddle of the blue roan, in front of the noisiest bar in town, the *Tin Cup*.

He was tall, bulky, hard-packed. He looked to have lived hard. There was red in his hair but it was a rusty red, not flaming. He strode to the bar rail and ordered a drink. The men there looked him over carefully. A few of them knew him.

Years before his father had owned one of the biggest cattle outfits in the territory. With his father's death it had been sold. Two brothers had split what remained. When Burke, the elder, had ridden away—along those dim trails which some said, afterward, he had known before—a bad reputation had floated back.

He was finishing his single drink, turning for a last survey of the room, when his brother came in. The *Tin Cup* patrons tightened. Not because it was Tony Donahue who came in, but because the youngest Donahue was not alone.

The brothers did not shake hands. They looked at one another.

"I was just about to cut some more alkali dust out of my throat; might as well join me, Tony," big Burke Donahue said finally. His eyes were gray and level, almost steel. In contrast the eyes of his brother were darker than they should have been—narrowed, smoldering.

Tony Donahue was handsome in his own way, slim, dark-haired and swarthy. He dressed his style. His shirt was of silk, the yellow bandana around his neck was silk.

BURKE looked past him at Tony's companion. First, at Sixto Salazar, behind Salazar, at the majordomo of his widespread interests, Rafael Guzman. Since Burke had departed from Aguas Ricos, Salazar had bought up a lot of the acres Burke had left for sale and had proceeded to add to them with land grants he managed to purchase cheaply. Salazar was a figure these days, a *rico*.

Tony said only, "So you come back, Burke." His tone was casual. He poured his drink, sucked at a lime before he raised it; but there was a hint of nervousness in his manner that was unlike him. "I wonder just howcome you get back—tonight?"

Burke raised his glass. "Tonight would seem to be a very good night, from all I hear," he said. *"Salud!"*

Tony's fingers came away from his glass. Under a deep tan his face had whitened. Strain showed in his jaw muscles. "What do you mean by that?" he demanded hoarsely.

Burke put his glass carefully back on the bar top. He said, in a lowered voice: "I just met Linda. She's waiting down at the hotel. She's—alone."

Anger flamed in the younger man's eyes. "What's Linda Revere to you?" he rasped. "What right have you got!"

"I said she's alone," Burke Donahue repeated patiently. Past his brother's shoulders he could see Salazar and Rafael Guzman stir slightly, edging closer. There was an evil spark in Guzman's eyes. His hand had dropped twice now, as though to reassure himself, against the thonged-down .45 at his side.

Salazar sipped at his drink, apparently not mindful of the conversation close to him. He was a squat, hard-set man, fastidiously attired, a blend of Mexican and Texan. He might have been younger but he looked about fifty and fit and capable. But his hard eyes were hooded. Never were they alive and knowing, like his *mayordomo's*. Yet somehow they saw everything.

There was an instant of silence. Finally Burke pushed his glass away. Thus far he had ignored the two men who had come in at the same time as his brother. Now his gray eyes barely slid over them, insolently, before he turned back to Tony.

"What are you doing in the company of the *jibaros?*" he murmured in a voice pitched conversationally. "You got a job, I hear, with Turkey Track. Foreman. Linda's father must be broad-minded."

Guzman stirred, hand on gun butt. Tony stepped away, eyes blazing. "So you've come back from below the Border in order to yap *killer* at me!" he cried. "Get out, Burke! Get out of here, before yo're carried out!"

Burke Donahue might have forgotten the two guns he wore, forgotten their reputation and his. He only gave a slow, unhurried nod. The watchers noticed the motion. They saw Burke's eyes flick past his brother to the apparently un-

concerned Sixto Salazar and the half-crouching Guzman. "I'm going," he said. "But I heard things, on the way up from below the Line, Tony. Heard some things even before I started. Don't do what you're planning to do—tonight!"

To the astonishment of them all he turned and walked with measured pace out of the *Tin Cup*. Someone emitted a sort of laugh that was not entirely mirthful. It was more like relief.

Burke Donahue led his mount down the street to where yellow, faded lights showed a shabby hotel interior. There he stepped inside.

Linda Revere was beautiful. Her anxiety had heightened the brilliance of her hazel eyes, rendered deeper the curve of her wide red mouth. Her glance held appeal when she looked at the tall man who came in.

Burke caught her two raised hands in his, pressed them gently for a second, dropped them. He said grimly: "Just seen Tony. He didn't seem any too friendly. He's with Salazar and that Guzman hombre. Guzman's got a Spanish name but he's from Texas. I want you to stay here, wait for me."

She touched his arm. "But Burke, what does it all mean? Tony is foreman of my father's outfit. Manager. Dad took pains to show he trusts him. After all the past, would Tony do such a thing? I've heard the stories."

"Some part of the stories may be true," Burke Donahue said steadily. "Tonight'll show. Wait here. I got to ride some more."

STILL her light fingers, gently restraining, touched his arm. "There's rumor of some kind of a raid tonight. I know of a roundup in the hills. Near Guadaloupe!"

He turned back to her, eyes steady. "Linda, there are always those stories. This one may have a basis. But you might recall there was a rumor that my brother Tony killed Burt Perry, his old boss on the Circle P. Perry had all his month payroll with him that night and he was gunned out in back of the *Tin Cup*. Tony knew he was to be there. He was to meet him and ride back. The money was gone after the killin' and Tony was in debt.

"God knows how your father ever had confidence enough in him to hire him after that business, even if they couldn't prove his guilty! But there it is. If someone could make it look like Tony actually did have a hand in that killing, they'd find it easy to make him accessory to this proposed raid you heard talk about, wouldn't they? And all the other raids recent in the *pais*, too!"

She drew back. "Yes," she said in a small voice. Her eyes studied his dark features. A less handsome face than Tony's. The lines that were in his face lent emphasis to the tales that had come of him from below the Line.

It hurt, a little. Linda Revere's concern was for Tony, Burke had been away too long. Yet the image of this girl had never ceased to haunt his memory.

He caught her twisting fingers. "Stick to it, Linda," he said. "You've heard wild tales about me. Tony'll join you here soon and you'll hear worse. But tonight I aim to rub out the black mark on the name of Donahue—whether he helps or not."

Without giving her the chance to protest further he turned on his heels and strode out. Tony, he knew, would show up here soon. Now he had other, dangerous things to do.

The tall roan went pounding hard out of Aguas Ricos to merge into the darkness of the hills. The Border Line lay close here, criss-crossed along this stretch by numberless dry washes, gulches, shallow streams. Beyond it lay the white desert, stretching to the black rock hills.

The dark hills lay to the north. Burke Donahue pushed upward into them. In an hour he came to where a fork in the road showed him a slender bar of pallid light ahead.

He slipped quietly from the roan's saddle, threw the reins over the animal's head, and stalked into the yellow glow thrown from the open doorway of a low-built *cantina* perched precariously among the rocks. He eased inside the low door-frame as a burst of mescal-hued laughter greeted him, along with a guitar's tune.

Other things greeted him too. Faces, blur-red through cheap cigarette smoke: evil, distorted faces, beady black eyes, livid scars, some of which were not quite healed. A tin-panny piano tried to drown out the guitar's metal melody. It stopped.

A short bar crowded the wall in the rear. In between its wet surface and the other walls stood tables, several of them. Burke, aware of all eyes upon him, picked unerringly his destination. He moved with a light, pantherish step across the room.

A girl, sitting alone at a corner table, possessed a vivid beauty, startling in this setting. Her face was young, fresh, even if slightly sullen. Hostile eyes watched Burke as he sat down in a chair across from her.

The girl's glance held a faint contempt toward her neighbors for the resentment his appearance had stirred. This place was very close to the Line, almost Mexico. Seldom Americans of the North came here.

Burke flashed her a quick smile, murmured, "*'S noches,* Conchita! Your playmates don't like me too much, eh?"

She shrugged. "They like few of your kind here," she said. Then she puffed a cigarette while he held flame to it, and took a modest sip from the glass before her.

HE WAS aware of the tension in the place. He could sense the hostility around him. But he had known what it would be before he had come here. His hand fell lightly on Conchita's wrist as he leaned forward to say, quietly:

"You've told me you know my brother Tony, Conchita." She nodded.

"Of course! *Seguro,* I know him!"

"You care for him—a little?"

"It matters to you, senor? *Porque?*"

"Hold it! I had an idea you and I were friends. If we are, we both know Tony's up to something tonight. That's why I'm here. You gave me a hint when I rode by this afternoon. What?"

She was staring hard at him. Her eyes were luminous, beautiful. Yet they were defiant, too. Soon they fell before his steady gaze. "I owe you a little, Don Burke Donahue."

"Not unless you think you do," he told her calmly. "When I saw you in that dive in Matazlan I simply asked you if it wasn't hateful for you to be serving drinks to drunken *vaqueros* and having to smile at them! You were only a child, Conchita. I was shepherding some cattle across the Line that night, and you crossed with me—preferred that to staying on there. You took plenty chances on that crossin'. It was legal, all right, but there was plenty hombres didn't want it to look that way."

Her head lifted. It was as though she were trying to reassure herself. "No, no! You think I do not know a woman meant an additional risk on that night ride? No! And then you turn' me over to friends of yours. I left them. I—I am the wild *paloma, amigo,* not you! *Yo creo!* Then I meet Tony. *Si;* he has come here often, though for a long time I do not know he is your brother. Now what do you want? I will pay what I owe!"

There was regal pride in her lustrous eyes as they met his. She was still vividly young, still scarcely more than a child. Now she again was employed in singing gay tunes for a motley crew of customers.

The friends with whom he had left her, had not been able to hold her for long. Recently one of Burke's men had run across her and had reported back to him.

"You owe me nothing," Burke told her steadily. *"Nada!* But you've already let me know there's to be another of those raids tonight. I've heard of it somewhere else, *tambien.*"

"So then it is that you fear for your brother Tony?" she said with quick intuition.

"You knew that." He pursued steadily. "I need your help, Conchita. For Tony's sake. For our—our friendship. What is the plan? I know you must know it—here. There is to be a trap. What kind?"

She squashed out her cigarette and the crimson on her red mouth blurred with the coal at the end of it. Her eyes watched it expire. Finally, quietly, she said:

"You are right. We will leave here, you and I. We will leave now."

And she twisted to her feet. The others in the *cantina* watched her and the tall, rusty-haired man at her side as they made for the door. During their progress Burke's fingers were never more than inches from either of his guns. But no one moved.

They gained the outer air. The stars pressed down and the night, at this altitude, was clean and cool. Conchita dropped light fingers over the man's leather-clad wrist.

"I go with you of course," she said simply. "For Tony! There is another

woman that I have hear' of but for that I do not care. I know where he will be. I know—*seguro!*—because I am to be there too!"

He looked at her, made no comment, and they swung into saddles and pounded back down the dark trails that led into Aguas Ricos.

BUT Tony Donahue was not in Aguas Ricos. Instead there was a mild ferment to greet their arrival. Linda Revere was where Burke had left her, at the tiny hotel. She was dressed for riding and there was high color in her cheeks. When she saw Burke and the strange girl draw up before the hotel in a cloud of dust, she stepped from the brief porch to meet them.

Burke, swinging from the saddle, caught the first apprehensive glance she gave his companion. He went to her, looked beyond her at what he sensed to be excitement at the end of the street.

"What's happened?" he demanded at once. "What's happened to Tony?"

"Tony showed up but he's gone!" she exclaimed breathlessly. Then quickly: "Burke, it can't be true! Tony—he wasn't going to betray us?"

"Tony is being forced into something, Linda," Burke said. "And this is Conchita. She's here to help us. What's happened?"

"That man Salazar and another—a 'breed, I think they called him Rafael—came here for him. He got here a little after you had gone. They told him it was time for him to get out on his job. I heard that much. He laughed at them. Then this man Salazar said: 'I know! It's that brother of yours has got to town and it's the brother making him talk back! You do your part tonight, Tony, or your string she is played out!' "

Linda ended up, breathless. Conchita was leaning down over her horse's mane. She was breathing rapidly. Her dark eyes had been following the excitement farther up the street.

"So Tony—he went away?"

"Yes. He said he had to stop something—a signal. They tried to hold him. I think he shot this Guzman man. But Salazar, I heard swearing he'd have him for more than that—*murder!*"

"Certainly!" Burke ejaculated. "That's their game. They think they've got a murder charge on Tony and he's had to play along with them. He was supposed to draw off his guards tonight, the trail crew. Then there was to be a signal so Salazar's men, south of here, could take control and drive their loot across the Border. Only Tony balked. And now they want his neck."

He swung around savagely on Conchita. "But what was the signal? Where was it from? How was he to let them know? They had to have that down to accurate timing."

Her eyes blazed back into his. "A fire from the top of the old ruined Mission of Our Lady of Guadaloupe!" she cried. "Come, *amigo!* They will not wait for Tony if they think they have caused him to run away. The raiders will be waiting for the signal. See? All the men are in town. No doubt fences are already down, pickets already placed to halt anyone who tries to follow. Come, Burke Donahue! We must stop that signal at Guadaloupe. That is what Tony tries to do—alone!"

There was anguish in her voice. Burke studied her, then wheeled his mount. "It's the way I was figurin'," he said. "But I needed to be sure. No use in riding all over the compass." He drew up alongside Conchita as a cry came from the hitchrail.

Linda was there, vaulting into the saddle of her pinto.

"I'm going with you, wherever it is," she said, pulling in. "I think part of this may be my job, too!"

Conchita commenced an expostulation. But Burke cut her off. "Ride, then!" he said between his teeth. "We're ridin' to stop more than a cattle raid tonight!"

Perhaps Linda Revere knew what Burke Donahue meant by that. She knew the cloud under which Tony had faced his fellow men for more than a year. For months after the investigation into Perry's death he had been an outcast.

Then her father had taken him on as top hand and, later, had promoted him to be ramrod at the Turkey Track.

He had been a foreman before, too. Of the Circle P. And then one night—on a night almost like this one—when he had been assigned to meet his boss and gun-ride the payroll for the spread, due the following day, Burt Perry had been shot down from ambush.

A POSSE had found signs of a fight. There was a smoke blackened gun in Tony's hand. The payroll was gone, along with the life to the man who had employed him. It had been very dark that night.

There was blood flowing thick from Tony's scalp, at the temple. Two shots had been exploded from his .44. The bullets matched with the lead in Burt Perry's chest, later on. Yet a cowman jury had been lenient in its way. The jury had professed to believe in Tony's tale of a sudden onrush and shooting.

However, the money was gone. There had been sufficient time, in the interval following the sound of the shooting, for it to be disposed of. Some said an accomplice, for he had been wounded. There had been a great deal of money, too. For beside the payroll there had been cash drawn to meet the construction of a new silo, three new stud mares yet to be paid for at top prices, and a new piece of irrigation.

There had been a trial. But except for the fact that Tony Donahue was known as reckless and wild, and his elder brother was believed to be wilder, off long-looping somewhere below the Mexican Border, there was little evidence. Poker debts. Bar debts here and there. But the Donahue brothers had received a little money from the sale of their property after their father's death. Nothing could be proved—only hinted at and believed in the shadows. . . .

Burke's roan was a magnificent animal. Hard ridden as he had been on the trail for the last days, he still had need to be checked from time to time as the trio struck deeper into the hills, bearing upward.

"Tony'll be there," Burke said grimly. "And I know why he's gone. They'll be on his heels, too."

"They would not know he will go directly there," Conchita remonstrated. "You forget, this signal is supposed to come from me—when Tony tells me things are ready. If they are chasing him, he will double through these hills. He is no fool."

"No," Burke agreed sternly.

Linda looked at the other girl as if seeing her for the first time. Perhaps she felt a twinge of envy at her wild, untamed beauty.

They pounded on. The air cooled. The old mission for which they were headed had been well chosen for a rendezvous. Abandoned by its founders with the backwash of settlers more than fifty years before, it had been slowly crumbling into a picturesque and forgotten mass of ruins. But still, with its situation atop a broken spur in the mountainside, with its tenantry of bats and owls and lizards—it yet commended the whole sweep of valley borderwards.

At last, *"Aqui!"* Conchita breathed, and swung her pony off the trail. The others followed her.

Aloft the outlines of the abandoned mission uprose stark against a purple skyline. As they checked their mounts the mission looked like something out of the pages of a book. A placid illustration. Behind it were clouds; beyond it fathomless opacity.

Burke reined in first. He sat his mount listening. Linda stole a glance at his dark face. Then she, too, heard the pounding of rapid hoofbeats mounting the twisting trail they had followed.

"That'll be our friends," he said. "But what is up ahead?"

They pushed their mounts on. As they approached the short clearing in front of the fallen mission building a shot cracked out over their heads, whining close.

"Stop right where you are!" a hoarse voice challenged.

It was then that Burke Donahue's horse shied and he could see a dead man lying across the path. He raised his hand, palm outward, cried out:

"Tony! It's Burke, Linda! Hold it!"

No one spoke as they picked a way across the fallen body. They pulled up in the clearing. Above them the ruined bell tower of the mission towered skyward. In the half-fallen chapel doorway Tony Donahue was standing, legs spread wide apart.

He looked haggard. There was blood on his left cheek, high, and blood ran down over his left wrist. His right hand held a cocked .44. His eyes were hostile.

"So, Burke, you come in to sit on the kill, eh?" he ground out. "Who's behind you?"

LINDA REVERE started to speak. But before she could utter a word Conchita had slipped to earth from the back of her pony like a sprite, and was running to Tony's side. Her erstwhile

companions pulled back and watched. They could hear her voice but not her words. Her arms were around Tony's shoulder. At last, his head lifted.

"Well, you asked for it, Burke," came in a flat harsh croak from Tony's throat. "What Linda's doin' here is none of my worry. Know what it's all about?"

Burke had dismounted and was walking steadily forward. "I think I'm beginning to know, Tony," he said. "They managed to tag something onto you for Burt Perry's kill. So you've had to take their orders, right along. Right?"

Tony answered with a harsh laugh. "Tagged something on me?" he repeated. "Only murder! They can string me up for it. Rafael Guzman can swear that he saw me kill Perry that night. Guzman's takin' orders from the hombre you saw at the bar, Sixto Salazar. *Muy caballero guapo* in these parts. And they been tryin' to make me do what they told me to do ever since. Only tonight—I quit!"

"Why, Tony?" Burke's voice was low; one ear was cocked for sounds on the trail behind.

"Why?" Tony stopped, confused momentarily. "No matter. Who cares? The point is that the signal for the big scoop is to come from here tonight. All the cattle they been pulling off and holding up are going to cross tonight. They know by now I'm throwin' 'em down. My men are out. But there'll be no crossing because their *vaqueros* won't come across the line except at my signal. Therefore it's out for me. And by bringing Conchita up here with you—you fool!—you've signed her death warrant too. The light's supposed to be lit in the bell tower right here. They're waiting for it to move their bunch. Supposed to be lit by me—or if I couldn't get here, by Conchita, at my signal. Now they'll kill us all!"

Linda it was who stepped close to him and said, into his twisted face: "Tony! you didn't kill Perry, did you?"

"No! But they can make it look like it!"

"Who did?" Burke snapped.

"*Quien sabe?* I know I was on the scene and later on I found my own gun in my hand. It'ud been used too. And Perry was dead. And then Guzman was there helpin' me to get clear."

"That's all you know?"

"Isn't that enough? Why, I couldn't honestly swear that I didn't do it in a drunken moment. There's only Guzman's word that someone else was there —*he thought!* Enough to cause doubt, anyhow. But it meant I had to take orders, which I been doin'. Even at that, tonight I was through. With you back, Burke. I don't know just why. I set out for here to meet Conchita, tell her I wasn't standing for that signal being given, stop her any way I knew. Then, maybe we'd ride across the Border with her if she wanted that."

"Oh, Tony!" Conchita's voice came soft but in it was a choked, broken appeal. "You mean we would go away?"

"I thought maybe. After I made sure no signal came from here tonight. But it's too late now. You three have managed to mess up the party." Tony turned back from them. His arm still dangled. Over his shoulder, with his hollow laugh, he said: "Anyway, I'm here to see there's going to be no signal from that tower tonight!"

Conchita ran to him. "But no, Tony! There will be no signal. I will not make it."

"Of course, you won't! Not with Burke Donahue, that virtuous long rider from Mexico on the spot!" Tony swung suddenly on his brother. "Just what did drag you into this?"

Burke had listened. He hesitated.

"My name is Donahue," he said at last. "Remember?"

Tony brought up, eyes widening. But he had no time for the retort on his lips, lips that were commencing to twist in that old bitter way. For the hoofbeats that his brother had heard were clearer now, pounding with savage purpose up that twisting trail. Three or four horsemen at least were coming.

"Inside!" Burke commanded crisply.

HIS voice carried authority. They all crowded past the door and into the interior of the adobe shack that hunkered underneath the bell tower of the mission. The place was ageless and crumbling, but its walls were thick. Moonlight came slanting down through long jagged spaces where the roof had fallen in.

Burke looked it over. His face was grim. There were women here, but that would have no effect on the men who were roaring along the uptrail. The women could take their chances. Tony

must not talk! That was the reason behind those clattering hoofs. And it meant that anyone who heard him talk must not live to tell.

From the rear of the place Burke turned to see Linda examining his brother's rifle. Near her, making little clucking sounds, Conchita was bending over the wounded arm.

Burke moved fast. No one was paying heed to him. He gripped a sagging rafter eight inches above his head, swung himself up to catch his spurred heels in a beam there. The wood began to crumble, but he was digging his spurs in as the first challenge directed the attention of the others to the outdoors.

"Come out of there, Tony Donahue! The *fiesta's* over!"

Tony's voice came back in a snarl: "Hello, Guzman! That yore man I had to gun out down on the path below? He aimed to give me orders, only he didn't have what it takes to back 'em up. You see what he got?"

Guzman's voice was steadier. "I give you no orders. I only tell you what is best for you."

Then a smoother voice cut in. "*I* give out the orders." It was Sixto Salazar talking, half Texan and half Mexican. "Donahue, you have disobeyed tonight. You become brave because your brother appears in Aguas Ricos, no doubt. But we give you another chance. You like that?"

"What kind of a chance?" Tony's voice snarled back.

"Get your brother out of the way and we play like before. No more bad words will be spoke between us. No threats. We all make money on tonight. We live nice afterwards. Also we forget. Just like before."

Evidently the attackers had not reckoned on the presence of two women just there. They knew about Conchita but obviously believed her either incapable of betrayal, or else too fearful. Suddenly a voice broke in:

"Too many horses!" The voice was a kind of shriek. "That she-devil Conchita! And that *muchacha* from Aguas Ricos!"

Guzman's voice struck in like a lash. "Those women are here, Salazar, I told you that before. They've got to be! That means they heard what you just said!"

Salazar cursed. "*Basta! Oiga!* Get him!"

But behind him something was happening. As his men scattered to break before the sagging door the horses they had ridden in and tethered began to stampede. And as the mission door sagged inward under the shattering crash of a hurled rock against it, Tony appeared there. He was smiling, his arrogant smile.

"*Bueno!* Come and get it!"

"Not yet!"

Burke Donahue's voice from below, by the bed of the small trickle of stream. The attackers scattered. The voice of one of them came:

"*Cuidada!* It is that Donahue *del Sud*—from Mexico!"

"Right! Walk into it, *compadres!*"

Burke Donahue was coming in, walking slightly uphill, two guns leveled at his hips. And from the shack's fallen doorway flame was commencing to spurt.

Tony sagged back against the lintel with a wild blast from Guzman's six-gun. He came up, eyes blazing, trying to steady his arm for a new shot.

A blast came from a rifle inside the shack. Conchita's exultant voice called out: "*Uno!*"—and a man reeled away.

Salazar made for his horse. But the horses had been left untethered and Burke Donahue had stampeded them. Salazar made it to the trees at the edge of the stream, turned to whirl there savagely, gun in hand. One of Burke Donahue's shots caught him between the eyes as he was lining a bead on Tony.

GUZMAN was screaming like an enraged animal. He looked around him. He was almost alone. He had come with aid but it had scattered at resistance. Like a cornered rat he charged for the big man standing spread-legged in the open.

There was gunflame. Through it Rafael Guzman was able to see the eyes of Burke Donahue, mocking, coldly confident eyes. Moonlight played strange tricks in them, made them the eyes of a satyr. Guzman went down. Then he could hear the quiet cold voice saying:

"Don't thank me yet, Guzman. I wanted you alive. You got to talk. You won't live long but you'll get enough time to tell the sheriff the true story. Or you can give it to me now and die in peace! It was you who killed Burt Perry, wasn't it? And robbed him! And then

you and your boss Salazar saw how you could put the blame on Tony, make him believe he was responsible, and so take your orders!"

"I—I—*pero—si, si. Es* true. All is true of that. But I will not tell and you will not kill a man."

Burke Donahue lifted his gun above the wounded man's temple. A hand caught his leathered wrist. A voice he knew said into his ear:

"That's enough, Burke. I heard. We'll save him for the rope."

Then it was for the first time that Burke, his brain cleared of the red madness that sometimes came over him and that had contributed to his reputation, knew they were no longer alone. Realized that the fight at the mission was over. Sheriff Quade said:

"I reckon you know Mr. Revere, Burke Donahue. Didn't think we was going to squat on our haunches down there in town and wait for you to play the whole game out alone, did yuh?"

"We only had hunches and judgment to guide us," Revere explained. He was a tall thin man with thin moustaches and a small goatee. "Linda got to me and told me what she believed was happening. We didn't know for sure, even then. But we rode, and then we saw gunflame here at Guadaloupe."

There were shadowy figures behind him and the bow-legged law officer who had known the two Donahues from youth. Quiet men. One of them now touched flame to a cigarette but no words passed. Revere turned to the shack. In a moment his daughter was in his arms.

Burke sat down wearily. He did not feel like conversation. Tony had been cleared. Conchita was there in the shadows with him and Linda was near. He lit a cigarette and let the rage ebb from his big body.

LINDA said, on the way back down the slope, under the stars: "She loves him, Burke. That should make all the difference. And if Tony wants to pull stakes now and settle himself south of the river somewhere I don't see what cause you have to object. You've finished your job."

He looked at her. Behind them her father and the hastily recruited posse trailed languidly. "You see, I thought I was getting Tony cleared, and back—for *you*, Linda," he said. "That's what I been working at for the last months down below the Line. The connections with the raiders' tie-up here and there. And now I'm uncertain. Linda, I've never been uncertain before. I always knew."

She smiled a little. It was a tender smile, almost maternal. Then she reached out and caught his hand as they walked their mounts side by side through the serene moonlight.

"You wouldn't have to be uncertain now, Burke," she said in her gentle voice. "If I know what you mean—why haven't you asked me before?"

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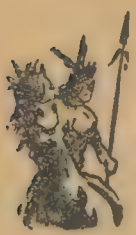
# ARMY COMMISSION

## By BARRY SCOBEE

*Sergeant Duggan's whole future depended on obeying the orders of a vengeful major, and they were orders he could only countermand!*



SERGEANT DUGgan hurried over the crunching snow, through the below-zero January weather. He was headed for the three-room adobe house which had been abandoned previously by some disheartened and unknown settler, and was now camp headquarters.

As he stepped up on the porch three privates came out of the door of Major Townstreet's office. They gave him grins and winks. Their eyes were shining with the brightness of enlisted men who have successfully lied to an officer.

Duggan stepped inside and closed the door against the bitter, still cold. He removed his forage cap and stood at strict military attention before the makeshift board table and his immediate commanding officer.

"The major sent for me, sir," he said.

"Sergeant Duggan, those three men you met going out—were they away from camp last night?"

"They appeared to be in their blankets, sir, when I checked at nine o'clock."

"Appeared to be! Enlisted men lie like dogs for one another. They have no honor. Those three lied to me. I have reason to believe they left camp and spent half the night down at the Indian assembly, against all orders. But I can't prove it."

A small sound drew Sergeant Duggan's attention momentarily away from the officer. Headquarters Clerk Powlson, known as the "indoor corporal," grinned and winked for Duggan's benefit. Major Townstreet looked around suspiciously, but too late to catch Powlson at the impudence. He came back at Duggan:

"I'll catch Powlson sometime!"

The major's heavy face was beet red, with blue and purple veins making a thready network. He was not so much angry of the moment as full of an abiding wrath and harassment. He was not a field soldier. He had been sent away from Washington, where he had kept cozy in the quartermaster's department for a dozen years, because, it was rumored, he had got to living on whisky. A year on the Indian frontier had probably reduced his liquor consumption but had enlarged his aversion for everything west of civilization, including soldiers. To add to his distress his behavior had been that of a prying old granny rather than of an officer.

"Duggan," he began, coming back to the subject for which the sergeant had been sent, "you are aware that that Indian with the incredibly silly name, Chief Jimmy Bigpants, has left the assembly grounds? Took his entire individual tribe and skipped out?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you find out?"

"One of Jimmy's—one of the chief's sons came and told me, sir."

"Why didn't he tell me? I am the commanding officer here."

"Well, I speak something of their lingo, sir."

"Felt more your equal, eh? You've associated with the redskins quite a bit, haven't you? Speak a dozen of their dialects, I understand. I knew you had talked with him early this morning. Why didn't you report it to me promptly?"

"I reported to the officer-of-the-day, sir, Captain Rodney. I assumed he would report to you."

"He did, only a little a while ago, with the excuse for hours of delay that he assumed the renegade chief would re-

"Dismount, men," Duggan ordered. "Walk!"

turn of his own accord to the assembly grounds in a few days. I am acting on no such absurd assumption. I have my orders to hold the savages on the assembly area and I intend to carry them out rigidly." He considered the sergeant from cocked eyes. "Duggan, this Bigpants is an especial friend of yours, isn't he?"

"I have had several peacepipes with him."

"Peacepipes! I am informed that you lived with him for a month once, in his tepees, in all his squalor and smoke and smells."

"On orders, sir, negotiating for him to go to the reservation."

"Negotiating! Coaxing! Wheedling! Spoon feeding!"

THE SUBJECT of Chief Jimmy Bigpants was known to be a sore one

with the major. The officer had been ordered a month ago to get the sub-chief and his people to the assembly grounds for removal to a reservation. Townstreet had taken nearly a full troop. He had ordered and blustered and threatened. The foxy Bigpants had paid humble attention, had nodded, and had given the soldiers the slip.

Duggan, on a scouting detail with half a dozen troopers, had run across the recalcitrant Jimmy and persuaded him to take his people to the grounds. The colonel, on a visit to the new camp, and before the assembled squadron, had commended Duggan's diplomacy and his insight into Indian character, ignoring Townstreet. The major was finding it difficult to recover from the snub.

"Sergeant Duggan," he said, pursuing his inquisition, "how many men are in camp? Oh, I know I can get the figures from the morning report. But that is nearly a day old. I am asking as of the moment."

"Twenty-two enlisted men, sir, six of them convalescents. They include the quartermaster and commissary sergeants on permanent detail. Two officers, yourself and Captain Rodney, who is also a convalescent. We are put to it, sir, to have six men on guard without the usual day's rest—"

"Never mind the volunteer information. The convalescents will have to do guard tonight. You will take thirteen men and pursue the renegade redskin and his people and return them to the assembly grounds."

"Yes, sir. To get thirteen I shall have to take Corporal Powlson."

That threw consternation into the listening "indoor corporal," as Duggan intended. The corporal, in an adjoining room, shook his head violently and waved his arms in wild protest to Duggan. He sprang up, snatched a handful of official papers, and came trotting in to lay them before the major.

"Sir, here are some of the papers for today, sir. For your signature, sir. There will be more—I'll have to work half the night—"

"Yes, yes." Townstreet brushed Powlson away impatiently. "You can't take him, Duggan. He'd freeze to death." And with that, he pulled the stack of papers toward him and began to sign his name.

His mind was on something else as he wrote, and the something else emerged when he finished with his pen.

"Duggan, that civilian scout, the smart-alec one with the hideous snakeskin belt, came in a while ago and reported that Bigpants is ten miles from here, in Shallow Canyon down from the Raines ranch. He has gone into camp. You will take twelve men, and carry subsistence for three meals. That means you will be back here by tomorrow afternoon or go hungry.

"You will take two pack mules with corn rations for the animals," he continued. Then he heaved to his feet, breathing heavily. He leaned forward, pecking the table with his thick fingers. "You will destroy that Indian camp with fire. You will burn every tepee—"

"In this weather, sir!" The protest sprang from Duggan's throat involuntarily.

"Sergeant, do not question me! I know what the weather is. You will burn the camp. You will drive every buck and squaw and papoose back to the assembly grounds. If there is resistance you will fire into them. If necessary you will shoot down every despicable savage in the party. You will—" He paused. He thought a while, as if he were studying a picture in his mind. Then his eyes jumped back to Duggan. "You will make the snow scarlet with blood, if need be. That redskin must be punished! Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will set out, then, at once."

Sergeant Duggan's face was burning with rage. He turned to the door.

"Just a moment, Sergeant."

Duggan faced back to the table.

"Sergeant Duggan, you have gone up for a commission. You hope to receive appointment as a second lieutenant."

"Yes, sir."

"You appear to consider yourself a born soldier. You love the service. You hope to make the army your career. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Duggan—" Townstreet was emphasizing every word—"I am intrinsically opposed to the appointment of enlisted men to officer status. That has long been a conviction with me. It has taken deeper root with my service on the frontier, being in direct contact with the common soldier. They lack background. They lack training in ethics; they have no code of honor. There is

no finer sense of honor in this world than in our Army's officer personnel. It is ingrained at West Point; it is an officer's soul!"

The anger was mounting in Duggan in overpowering waves. This man meant to ruin him! And now, the mention of West Point. For Townstreet was a political appointee. Didn't he know that an officer's record, his reputation and scandals, hounded him clear down to the enlisted ranks, to guardhouse gossip and slurs?

"Duggan, I understand you call yourself the Indian's friend. Well, I will tolerate no softening-up on my orders, in dealing with that blackguard savage. You will burn his tepees to the last charred scrap of animal hide, and return him and his people to the assembly grounds. I will take no deception, no soldier trickery, no friendship or mercy excuses. . . . Sergeant Duggan, are you aware that appointment to a commission may hang upon the endorsement of the man's immediate commanding officer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then we understand each other thoroughly?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is all."

AT LAST Duggan was out on the porch, free again in the blessed cold. He was sweating inside his clothing, and a hate was all-consuming. But queerly, the hate was even then abating, because as he had closed the door, he saw the officer, with trembling hand, lift a bottle from a field-desk, an expression of frustration and defeat on his mottled face.

In less than an hour Sergeant Duggan was riding out of the camp at the head of twelve men in column of twos. Sullen, resentful men not yet recovered from the first shock of the cold.

"Blasted Q. M. clerk!" Private Slimson whanged, meaning Townstreet. "Why couldn't he have waited till tomor'? Wher's Bigpants a-goin' tonight, in this snow?"

Nobody answered.

They rode along the edge of a low bluff at first, keeping to the mounted sentry's beaten path. They looked down upon the assembly grounds to an encampment of something like seven hundred rebellious, resentful Indians, men, women and children, pacified temporarily by the Government beef and corn they were receiving and held inactive by the numbing weather. The remainder of the squadron and at least part of the regiment was scouring the country for a hundred, or two hundred, miles to round up more of the tribe—which widespread coverage accounted for so few soldiers here in the squadron camp.

Even in the cold, a still, deadly cold, the smells of the camp came up. Acrid smoke of fires, the odors of roasting meat, the stink of animals newly slaughtered, and the worse stench of rotting waste matter. No wonder Major Townstreet hated this raw frontier, Duggan thought in one of his infrequent surges of revulsion. He knew that this savagery was something he would never get completely used to though he should be in contact with it through all the remainder of his soldiering career.

They left the sentry's path and took to the foot-deep snow.

"Guns, but this is something for horses to travel in!" Duggan explained, his sympathy touched by the reluctant animals.

"All right f'r yeller-stripes like us'ns, though," said old Private Hawkins, just behind the sergeant. "Horses cost forty dollars."

The sun was a glittering flame in the southwest, giving no slightest warmth. It made them squint at the snow to find their way over the treeless, brushless scape of long rolling hills and shallow valleys. In small hollows the snow was much deeper, and was light and fluffy. Where the blizzard winds had beaten at it the surface was hard and crusty and the snow was packed. But it was not firm enough to hold up the horses' weight. They broke through at every step. Progress was painfully slow. Duggan kept to the higher ridges when he could, where the winds had blown the snow thinner. At times the stems of the short grass shone through.

In one of these stretches Private Hawkins spurred up to Duggan's side. The man had time and again worn the chevrons of a corporal or sergeant in his twenty-three years of cavalry riding for the Great White Father in Washington and had as consistently lost them through what he called the "deeming rum."

"Sarge," he said with the liberty of

an old soldier, "whut you payin' f'r commissions now?"

Every man in the squadron knew that Duggan had gone up for his officer's appointment. It amazed Duggan that he knew of not one man who resented the ambition. On the other hand, every man, apparently, was pulling for him. He cracked one puzzled word back at Hawkins.

"Why?"

"Oh, just wondering if you think they're worth the price you'll have to pay."

"What do you mean?"

"Burn out poor old Jimmy Bigpants, in this kind o' weather."

"What do you know about that, Hawk?" The sergeant was surprised that any of the men knew their precise objective.

"Huh, the whole camp knowed it 'fore you'd been away from the Likker Sack ten minutes."

"How?"

"The indoor corp'ral. Think Powlson could keep from spillin' sech juicy news as that? He told something else too, that I bet you ain't forgot."

"Well?"

"Your enlistment expires tomorrow, whether you git your commish or not."

Duggan hadn't forgot it. No soldier ever does. This time it made no difference, with the commission coming along. If it *was* coming along. If Townstreet didn't block it.

"You sure 'nough going to burn out old Jimmy and all them women and kids, Sarge?"

The persistent Hawkins. Duggan did not answer, for suddenly the implications of all that the major had said were beating at him. He had not had time to think of them until now—or he had kept them out of his mind through instinctive self-defense; out of reluctance to face them.

Now he put the facts down and added them up savagely: Townstreet hated the frontier. He hated enlisted men, who were forever sneering at his inadequacy, and of which he was sensitively aware. He despised the Indians beyond words. He was embarrassed by his failure to corral Bigpants a month ago and by Duggan's success at it. He was stung to the quick by the colonel's snubbing of him over the matter. He was determined on vengeance on the Indian sub-chief by way of one Sergeant Duggan. He was liquor-soaked, and if Duggan failed him—

Hot blood pounded in Duggan's neck. To lose his commission now, when it was so near! To lose five years of hard and intelligent soldiering because of an officer like Townstreet! Lose it by some slip of fate, by some instinctive generosity that would offend a drunken major. Cursed if he would! He would let *nothing* interfere.

"What you say, Sarge? Kinda gruntin'."

"Nothing! Nothing."

HE WAS relieved that they were crossing a little valley of deeper, lighter snow. It gave him something to do to clear his thoughts. He pulled aside to watch the column go by, to see how the men and animals were faring.

"Merry Christmas, Sarge!" said Private Sigmond, but it was no happy greeting; it was a curse, a condemning of the Army, its officers, Washington's Indian policy, all redskins in the West, the whole world, and cold and snow and freezing feet.

"Who wouldn't be a sojer boy!" said another through stiff, half-frozen lips.

Then Private Littlefield came along. He was leaning down, his mittened hand gripping the calf of his right leg. He hadn't seen Duggan.

"Giving you trouble, Lit?" the sergeant asked, referring to the man's arrow wound that had been slow to heal.

"Just the cold," Littlefield said.

"Quit babyin' it!" snarled the man beside him. "You ain't no colder'n I be."

Men could be cruel to one another, Duggan thought. It was the cold, now, the misery of this ride. Well, he'd be cruel, too, before the night was finished.

The little column slogged past. Duggan fell in beside Corporal Chimes who was behind the two pack mules. He had the yellow-lined cape of his cavalry greatcoat pulled up over his head, and it gave him the look of being topped off with a pumpkin. He tried to grin through the front slit.

"Hi, Sarge! Summer is on the way." Then he added: "When do we eat, and how, in this snow? Hardtack and salty sowbosom! I wish you was a lootenant an' commandin' the camp. You'd use daylight and warmer weather f'r harassin' the redskins."

"We'll chow at the Raines place," said Duggan.

They were through the fluffy snow and mounting a slope. The sergeant made his way back toward the lead. Littlefield was bending over again, holding his leg. The unbalanced weight made the horse stagger.

"Better sit up, Lit," Duggan admonished. "Horse can't take too much of that, in deep snow."

They struggled out to a ridge-top. The great cold fire that was the sun was burning through the horizon. It vanished, and black shadows settled in every little depression. The hills became purple, the snow turned blue. The world was beautiful, cold, and savage.

But the Raines ranch lay in sight, just ahead, in the shadows of Shallow Canyon. A light blinked in the house; it was near to night there.

John Raines and his daughter Sally came out into the yard to greet them.

"An unexpected pleasure," he said. There was question in his tone. Raines was an ex-captain of cavalry, medically discharged. He knew that troops did not ride in such cold without a valid reason.

Duggan gave him an honorary salute, answered the unspoken question as he dismounted.

"Major Townstreet instructed us to ride this way, to see if the Indians had bothered you."

"No bother here, Phil," said Raines, still puzzled.

"Jimmy Bigpants has left the assembly grounds," Duggan supplied. "He might be in need of beef."

"No signs. Dismount your men, Sergeant. There's shelter in the long shed for men and horses."

"We're riding on tonight," said Duggan. "All we can use is a bare spot for a cooking fire."

"Oh, no you don't!" Raines insisted.

"Not in this cold!" Sally chimed in. "We barbecued half a beef yesterday, just in case of company. Won't take Juan and Marta two jiffies to warm it up. The men can eat in the kitchen—and have biscuits and coffee too."

A little sighing wind of breaths went over the men.

"We thought Christmas was past," said Duggan, and to the men: "Stand your horses in the shed and feed them corn."

"And hay," said Captain Raines. "The men will show you."

Corporal Chimes took over. Private Hawkins reached down for the reins of Duggan's mount. Over the sounds of their departure the sergeant spoke to his hosts:

"You'll freeze out here," he said solicitously. "These soldiers will remember you in their prayers. I'll get along with them."

"You quitting us, Phil, without news or anything?" Sally said quickly, almost in alarm.

"Ridiculous, Phil," said Raines. "Come in. You'll dine with us. Who is doing this to you? That quartermaster's clerk from Washington?"

"Major Townstreet wants the Indians back on the grounds by tomorrow," said Duggan stiffly, and the ex-captain and Sally chuckled, knowing that he was being soldierly loyal to his superior officer.

"Come, Phil, get out of this cold yourself."

Raines led the way, limping slightly from a straightness in one leg. Duggan stepped to the girl's side, took her elbow up the steps. Letting his hand drop to hers, he squeezed it and his heart raced at her return pressure. She pulled loose, then, and practically ran into the house.

The big warm livingroom with its cordwood-wide fireplace, its buffalo rugs and deep chairs, all but brought tears of gratitude to Duggan's eyes. He had been here half a dozen times in four months. Sally took his cap and overcoat and mittens.

"Bigpants can't really be on a rampage?" Raines asked.

"No, sir. I think not. It wouldn't be like him."

"What are your orders, if they aren't confidential?"

"To burn his camp," said Duggan in a low voice.

"Impossible!" Raines exclaimed. "An outrage! In this weather!"

And Sally Raines looked at Duggan, in wonder, and questioning, and compassion. Then she excused herself and disappeared kitchenward, to help the servants in this emergency of unexpected company.

RAINES poked up the fire. He sat down, his stiff leg straight out in front of him. Duggan squatted on the

hearth, to get the chill out of his bones, holding out his palms to shield his face. The ex-captain, veteran of Indian warfare from the Dakotas to the Southwest, stirred, and asked:

"Nothing about your commission yet?"

"No, sir."

"It'll come along. Bound to. The colonel won't miss adding a good Indian man to his officers."

"Unless—" Duggan let the sentence hang.

"Townstreet," said Raines, after a long pause. "Tonight." He knew how a mission such as Duggan's could damage a man's prospects. "Tsst-tsst."

They pondered in gloomy silence and mutual comprehension: In the hazardous profession of soldiering, if anything went wrong tonight, under Townstreet's orders to burn a camp—some unforeseen error, an antagonizing of the Indians, some unwitting upsetting of the War Department's plan of pacifying the redmen, or even an impulsive gesture toward honor and conscience and the humanities—Duggan's prospects could drop to zero.

And both men knew that without a commission Duggan would never take Sally to Soapsuds Row as a sergeant's wife. But it would be that or give up the Army for some civilian occupation.

Out of the silence Raines, the shelved captain, murmured: "It's hard to be a civilian."

It was a dinner that Duggan would never forget. Candlelight. Linen napery. Silver flashing its small gleams. Conversation as wide as the world. A liveliness that was almost forced, to keep thoughts away from the destruction of sheltering tepees in the bitter cold—the punishment of human beings for spite.

And Duggan kept feeling, in the back of his mind, that they were thinking, in the backs of their minds, "Will he do it—will Phil so hurt a simple people?"

At the door, when the detail was ready to depart, Raines said quietly:

"A soldier's first duty, Phil, is obedience."

Sally said nothing at all; made no appeal, gave no advice. She was an Army woman. But her eyes were bright with tenderness and hope when Duggan took her hand for a brief instant, and then turned away.

It was a clear night. A billion stars jabbing with their little sabers of light. Crunching snow, at first; and men gabbling as soon as they were out of earshot of the house.

"Biscuits and butter and jelly. Jelly! Hear that, Sarge? And a warm place to eat. People like that—not a worry in the world."

Then they were on the level floor of Shallow Canyon. Snow two feet deep. Floundering along. Men beginning to hunch in their coats against the dead-still cold. A horse falling, lunging up into another horse.

"We've got to get to higher ground," said Duggan, and when he found a cowpath up the twenty-foot cutbank they climbed out in single file.

"Sarge!" Shrill reproach, as if betrayed by a friend. "They's a wind up heah! It'll cut us in two at the middle."

It wasn't a wind. It was no more than a drift of air. But it drove through clothing and brought pain to old wounds, and muscles and bones. It was only a price paid for easier travel.

Still, progress was slow. Hunting thin snow. Floundering in gullies. Avoiding hillside drifts that could not be identified until the horses were in them. Traveling by instinct, part of the time, toward the unknown point of Chief Jimmy Bigpant's huddle of tepees. Horses tiring. Going slower and slower. Midnight, by the clock of the Great Dipper. *Good thing it turns.*

"Dismount, men. Walk a little. Ease the horses. Stir our blood again."

"Cripes, Sarge, I can't walk!" A man on his knees in the snow. "Joints plumb froze. Ow—ouch! I'm up, anyhow. Hold to the saddle f'r a piece."

"Sarge—I'm gonna desert—go over the hill—first chanct. This, f'r thirteen dollars a month, a straw bed and weevily beans."

"Yeh, we all say that, George."

"And you wantin' to be a loot. Spend a life at this. Well, ever' man to his taste. Luck to ya."

They rode on for a while, and later dismounted again and repeated the same performance. The cold was a heavy, numbing, dead-alive thing. Men said their feet were freezing. Once they found a knoll blown bare of snow. Duggan made them form a circle and link elbows and dance ring-around-the-rosy, while

he held the horses and stomped his feet, and one of the men sang hoarsely, "May pole, May pole!"

Half-way toward morning the moon came up, as cold as silver, casting new shadows on the hills. Unexpectedly Duggan saw a darting figure through the brush, and old Hawkins, beside him, grunted his surprise.

"A deer! An antelope!"

"An Indian," said Duggan, and tried to spur his horse through the snow.

The figure disappeared. But they could follow the broken surface and the black pits of fleeing footprints.

Then they were looking down at the vague shapes of conical tepees. Ten of them. Duggan counted. Jimmy Bigpants would have about one hundred people, braves and youths and squaws and kids. Ten to the tent.

A shrill, miserable, inquiring whinny came up. It drew the awakened men's attention to a dark blotch under the low bluff—the ponies of the runaways.

The troopers found a way down the bluff. Duggan could hear Corporal Chimes kicking the pack mules and cursing under his breath. The sergeant sent a profane, whispered command back for silence.

They reached level ground and saw the glow of embers in an overhanging shelter of the bank. Rifles were drawn from saddle-boots.

"Heck, my hands are so dead I couldn't pull a trigger!"

DUGGAN cautioned for silence, though he knew the camp must have guards out. Knew that they must know the soldiers were here. He spoke out abruptly in a normal tone, using Indian words. The men kept crowding their horses forward, eyes and hopes on that fire. They had no expectation of the warriors being hostile. Duggan and Hawkins left their saddles. They felt loose brush about their feet. Duggan picked up a few scraps and dropped them on the patch of embers. A blaze arose quickly. The troopers crept forward, rifles and bared hands showing in the light.

Duggan spoke out again. It was a command in the Indian tongue.

"Curses, Sarge," muttered one of the men, "you ain't gonna burn 'em out?"

"It'd warm us," another replied.

"Dry up!" Duggan was full of hate for this thing.

An Indian voice spoke choppingly from among the ponies: "Is it the Buffalo Sergeant who gives an order?"

Buffalo Sergeant! A title of friendship. He had once chased lawless white hunters away from the remnant of a buffalo herd on the Indians' last pitiful scrap of hunting grounds. It was this act that made Chief Jimmy Bigpants his friend.

"It is Buffalo Sergeant," said Duggan. "Bring your chief."

The man emerged from the mass of animals, watching cautiously. Seeing no hostile movement he stalked to the fire. He scanned the yellow-caped heads, hunting for faces, making certain of the Buffalo Sergeant. He looked at the soldiers' stiff hands held out to the growing flames, saw the rifles across squatting laps—rifles nearly worthless, with frozen hands.

The Indian's eyes were sunken, his face strained from the misery of the night. He wore a blanket hugged tight around his torso. Duggan saw moccasined feet and bare legs. This band of Indians was even poorer than the rest.

"The devil's half naked!" gasped a soldier, incredulous, sympathetic.

"Prairie Dog," said Duggan, "go bring—" and he spoke a long string of jerky syllables that made Bigpants' Indian name, unpronounceable to most white men.

The young brave gave the soldiers a final blaze of hate and stalked away.

The soldiers put on more fuel. They formed a squatting circle around the fire. Duggan, squatting too, looked at them one by one. Some were tattlers, loose tongues, some tight-mouthed. Suddenly that did not count. He spoke to them.

"Men, give me your matches. Strip your pockets!"

They stared at him, dull-eyed, or surprised, or questioning, according to their natures. And one protested.

"Sarge; you ain't a-gonna burn 'em out! Leave 'em to freeze!"

Duggan straightened to his feet. "Shell out," he ordered. "I want every match."

Their numb fingers unbuttoned overcoats, delved into pockets. Duggan watched hands and faces, to see that no man held back.

"You 'fraid we'll use 'em to fire the

igloos?" a man asked scornfully. "Heck, Injuns and us is brothers in misery."

"The sergeant is aiming to start the blazes himself," said another. "Taking the blame off us."

In the end Duggan had a handful of the square-cut, black-headed sulphur matches. Then Indians were coming to the fire. It was Jimmy Bigpants himself and his two sons, youths under twenty years of age. The soldiers made room and the three squatted, their rock-set faces without expression.

Duggan bided his time, finally spoke. "Cold weather, Chief."

"Cold," said the sub-chief in English.

"I've been sent to burn your tepees and blankets and drive you back to the assembly grounds."

"What pay for Injun be civilized redskin."

It was a statement, not a question. The man made an effort to be "civilized," to learn white ways and to lead his people in the same direction. He had the intelligence to perceive the futility of using guns against white soldiers. Bigpants wore white men's clothing, and it was his usual over-size pants that had given him his nickname.

"Why did you leave the assembly grounds, Chief?" Duggan asked.

The man appeared to gather his thoughts, then began to speak carefully in his own tongue.

"The chief of our family, who is higher than I," he said, "the son of our father but not of my mother. He charges me with being too friendly to the white men. He charges around the council fire that I will make the Indians nothing. He will appeal to the Great Council of our totem tribe, when the Yellowlegs bring in two more chiefs, that I be shamed and stripped and that he become the chief of my family people."

"Can't you outtalk him before the Great Council?"

"I have no fear to talk before the Great Council."

"Why did you run away from up there?"

"Our father, who is very old, who hates the white men, would give my people to my brother. He would take the chieftancy from me and my son."

His hand reached from his blanket and touched the shoulder of his older son; a gesture of possession and affection.

"Our father says that I and my sons have become white men. Two days past he takes half our blankets, half our ponies, half of our Government beefs, and gives them to my brother. It is the beginning, a threat. Soon he will take the rest. And he will take the totem, the token of me, of my sons, of my clan, our authority, and I will be in disgrace."

SO THAT was it. A family quarrel. A small thing to most white men; a great thing to the Indians. Something that many an army officer and Indian agent had overlooked.

"I have hard orders to burn your camp, Chief. To drive you back."

An expression of adamant defiance settled in the Indian's face. He looked with scorn at the white men around the fire. Then he seemed to relent and went on in a milder tone, telling them facts that were in themselves a plea.

"Our tepees are cold tonight," he said. "We do not have enough blankets and hides to cover all of us. Our last beef was eaten yesterday. Our babies are crying. My men sit without blankets and hug their knees. We did not make fires lest the soldiers see and find us. But you are Sergeant Duggan. You do not need firelight to lead you to us. . . . You have orders. Burn us out. Then there will be fewer babies to grow up. They will die in the cold and snow. No greater cold have I seen but once, in my youth. The old people will die. Your men may shoot some of us. That will please white men." He added in a sharp shout: "You are the Buffalo Sergeant!"

The shout, Duggan knew, was the climax, an appeal for the mercy of friendship. The Indian had no more to say. He stared down at the fire waiting.

"Gad," whispered one of the men who had been able to follow the talk. "He's right about the kids and old folks. They'll die. It must be twenty below."

"Chief," said Duggan, "return to the assembly grounds with your people. I'll go and talk to your father and brother. I will see to it that your clan and your goods and your authority are not taken from you. I, the Buffalo Sergeant, say this."

"No. Burn us out."

It was the resentment of the unjustly treated. Bitter defiance to the threat of fire. The pride of a proud man. The hurt of a friend.

Duggan did then that which he had known, in essence, he would do. He had known it back at the Raines home, in Sally's presence. And he did it dramatically, to appeal to an Indian mind.

He held out the handful of matches for the chief to see, and then slowly turning his palm, he let them fall into the fire. Then he got up and began to kick snow on to the fire, and instantly comprehending, the troopers helped him until it was a wet and blackened mass.

"Chief," said Duggan, "we have no more matches and no more fire."

The Indian nodded. "You are the Buffalo Sergeant. I will return."

IT WAS mid-afternoon when the detail rode wearily into camp. The weather had not softened, and they went straight to the sheltered picketline. Powlson, the indoor corporal, showed up in a minute or two. He was gabbling something about a courier having arrived from regimental headquarters with news that two hundred more Indians were coming under escort.

Duggan's attention drifted away. He had turned his horses over to Hawkins and was helping a man along to the medical tent where the quartermaster sergeant functioned as medico. The man's feet were severely frost-bitten.

In a moment Corporal Powlson's voice called from outside. Duggan stepped out. Powlson grinned insinuatingly.

"You don't need to worry about not burning out Bigpants, Sarge." Already the troopers were talking! "You can tell that unappreciative whisky tank where to go."

The clerk flicked open a folded paper and held it before Duggan. It was hard and shiny and about eight by ten inches in size. Across the top, in a curving line, were the words: ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES. Duggan knew it instantly for his enlistment discharge form. As with every soldier, his glance darted to the word penned under "Character." The word was "Excellent." His eyes dropped to the signature.

"Townstreet," he said wonderingly.

"Well, he had the authority, in the absence of your troop commander."

Duggan looked stern. "Did the major know what he was signing?"

"Does he, half the time?" Powlson retorted. "I slipped this in a stack of papers, just to do you a good turn. Knew you wouldn't burn out Bigpants in this cold. You're a civilian now. You can thumb your snoot at that big bellyacher now and not say sir. . . . Sarge, don't get sore."

Duggan was ripping the paper into strips. He flung them to the ground and went back into the tent.

Twenty minutes later Duggan was entering Townstreet's office. The major was in the act of returning to his chair. Had he been at a window, watching, spying? Powlson was not in the adjoining room. Townstreet regarded Duggan in his customary heavy way. He asked bluntly: "What was that paper you tore up, a while ago?"

"My enlistment discharge, sir."

Townstreet laughed a rocky note or two. At least it sounded like laugher; there was no mirth on his face. Maybe it was a sound of surprise.

"Did you burn that redskin's tepee?"

"No sir."

Townstreet's surprise, if that's what it was, increased.

"I knew that, too," he said.

Duggan nodded. Then he said, "The chief, at least, is back on the assembly grounds with the trouble all settled."

The major still continued to regard the sergeant. Finally he stirred his bulk and spoke again, obliquely.

"A courier came in from the colonel," he said and then paused. Suddenly he got up. "I'm out of whisky. Haven't had a drink since morning." He produced a bottle with about three fingers of liquid in it. "Brandy," he said. "Been saving it."

The officer produced two glasses and divided the brandy. He took up one glass.

"That one is yours," he said.

"With an enlisted man, sir?"

"Perhaps I have been wrong about enlisted men. I've known all day you didn't burn the camp. Sent the quartermaster sergeant to annul the order. He missed you but he reported you hadn't burned the tepees. An honorable act, with your commission in jeopardy. Drink up, Mr. Duggan."

"Mister?"

"Your commission arrived in the courier's pouch. Congratulations." He moved the glass to drinking range. "May your Army career be—rosier than mine has been." He nodded to the glass.

Duggan took it up.

"To your health, sir. And promotion."

*(Continued from page 9)*

outlaws who were used to working under his or some other leadership were constantly pointing out new setups, easy spots to rob, and persuading Doolin to ride with them again.

Once he even left the country, but could not live up to his good resolutions. So he was once more back leading his band on wild raids, once more making a name for himself as a desperate outlaw.

Riding in all kinds of weather, sleeping wherever he could while on the dodge after a raid or robbery, he finally contracted rheumatism and went to Hot Springs, Arkansas, to take the baths. Through an intercepted letter, Tilghman learned Doolin was there.

Tilghman went to Hot Springs, and in order to make recognition at least a little difficult he wore a long coat and silk hat.

After careful inquiry, Tilghman learned the man he sought was at a bathhouse. The officer walked into the parlour of the place and saw Doolin seated in a corner, where he could observe anyone who entered. The unusual clothes deceived him for a moment, and Tilghman covered him with his revolver, and said, "Hands up, Bill."

### "Don't Make Me Kill You!"

The tall, lank, sandy-haired desperado looked at him. Doolin had sworn never to be taken alive, and Tilghman knew it.

The bandit jumped up, reaching for the weapon hanging under his left arm. Tilghman did not fire, for he had learned of how Doolin had saved his life in that ranch house when he prevented Red Buck from shooting the officer in the back as he walked away and out of the trap, and now he did not want to kill Doolin if it could be prevented. He caught the outlaw's arm and with his shoulder drove him back to the wall, his own revolver pressed against the stomach of the bad man.

"Don't make me kill you, Bill!" he urged.

The weight of Tilghman's body pinned the bank robber to the wall and prevented his hand from reaching the revolver under his coat. Doolin struggled to escape from the disadvantage of position. He tried desperately to get at his gun.

With every ounce of strength he possessed, Tilghman held him fast. The barrel of the officer's revolver gouged into the other man's stomach. At any moment it might go off. Still Doolin fought, and as they struggled Tilghman begged the outlaw to surrender and not force him to shoot.

### The Surrender

One can well imagine some of the thoughts that were racing through Doolin's mind. Here was a man whose life he had saved, now pouncing upon him to bring him to justice. Maybe he was at the moment sorry that he had saved Tilghman's life, and yet he probably also reasoned that here was a real man, a man who though sworn to do his duty, wanted to do it without bloodshed. Doolin must also have realized that Tilghman could have pulled the trigger while his revolver barrel was almost buried in his adversary's stomach, but yet the brave lawman grappled with the outlaw, taking a chance on his own life rather than kill. At last Doolin gave up.

The outlaw was no coward. His words as he ceased his struggles and surrendered were, "Your six-full takes the pot," meaning that those six deadly leaden missiles in Tilghman's revolver had won the day and the officer now had himself a prisoner.

Tilghman took the outlaw to Guthrie, and he was lodged in jail, but he engineered a wholesale prison escape. Later he was killed in a duel with Marshal Heck Thomas. In this duel, Doolin had shot twice when Thomas opened up with a shotgun loaded with buckshot and the battle was over and another outlaw had crossed the great divide.

Thomas was one of the "Three Guardsmen." The other two were Bill Tilghman and Chris Madsen. These three officers were so called because of their relentless pursuit of criminals. Sometimes they worked together, sometimes separately.

Thomas was a deputy United States marshal and worked out of Fort Smith, Arkansas, where the celebrated Judge Parker passed the death sentence on so many men that on various occasions four, five and six men were hanged at the same time. Tilghman and Thomas took forty-one prisoners to this court on one train, nine of whom were given

the death sentence by Judge Parker.

"Uncle" Billy Tilghman, famous and beloved peace officer, who always gave the man he was attempting to arrest an even break, and more, who never drew his gun unless it was absolutely necessary and who took a thousand chances, by being reluctant to shoot a man, lost his life at the hands of a man whom he was arresting for making a disturbance in front of a dance hall.

Tilghman had, he thought, disarmed the prisoner, as he had taken away the one gun in sight—then without warning the madman drew another revolver and fired and the noted lawman fell dead. So died one man who upheld the law without fear or favor and who in the course of his career as a lawman, might have made some enemies, but won the respect of even his enemies. His friends were legion.

With the passing of Texas Jack, almost the last of the old outlaw gangs are gone, and from what I knew of Jack I believe he tried hard to atone for the misdeeds of his younger days. He was an affable fellow who seemed always to hold his temper well in check. He talked freely about the old bandit days, would point out a scar upon his body and tell how and when it was received. He never tried to justify his days of crime, but did what he could in his declining years to point out to the youth of the country that crime never pays.

That lesson has been forcibly brought out in the history of crime from the early owl-hoot days down through the years of our

[*Turn page*]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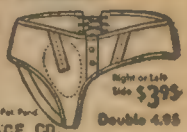
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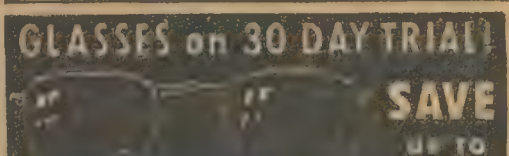

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—FOGHORN CLANCY.

## OUR NEXT ISSUE

AMONG the great stories of the world there are a few which have so captured the imagination of all humans, that they have made a place for themselves in the literature of all languages. Feats of human courage, of devotion, of honesty to principle, the triumph of man's spirit over the weakness of his body—these are the great stories of the human race.

Such a story was the bloody siege of the Alamo. And less well known, perhaps, but even more thrilling and astounding, was the epochal flight of Dull Knife and the Cheyennes from Oklahoma to the Black Hills of South Dakota through the entire western army of the United States and hundreds of bands of civilian posses!

This is a story that grows in stature with the years. A tiny band of starving Cheyennes, without food, without guns, in the dead of winter without adequate clothing, leaving their bloody tracks on the snow, leaving their dead and dying behind them, but again and again fighting off General Crook's best cavalry, slipping away to lose themselves in the badlands time after time.

And against this little fugitive band was marshalled all the resources of the United States. Trainloads of troops, alerted by telegraph, sheriff's posses, civilian cowboys, all eager to collect an Indian scalp, eager to round up and imprison the fleeing tribe.

Their crime? They wanted to go home. Home to the Black Hills, their ancient hunting ground, promised to them forever by solemn treaty. Forever—a short time in treaties made between white man and red. For the Cheyennes were snatched from the cool hills of Dakota and herded on a sun-blasted, parched piece of desert in Oklahoma, to starve on rations which every man knew were not enough for a dog, much less a human.

This was in the time of the Rio Kid. And the Rio Kid knew and respected old Dull Knife, the aged chief of the Cheyennes. Failing to win a hearing for himself and his people, Dull Knife turned to the Rio Kid for help, knowing that here was a white man whose words were true, who spoke not with forked tongue and who might, out of his terrible sense of justice, help these betrayed people.

The Rio Kid came upon the scene in time to thwart an attempted bushwhack killing of Dull Knife, an attempt which cost the life of Nanatahe, Dull Knife's nephew. And hearing the story of the death by starvation which awaited the Cheyennes, Pryor vowed to help.

"I have a friend in Washington," he told Dull Knife. "His name is Langford, Senator Langford. He is an honest man. I will appeal to him. I will ask him to use his influence with the government to have the Cheyennes returned to the north in peace."

It was an idea which might—in time—have worked. But there was no time. Forces were even then at work to break the Indians, to prison the braver spirits and crush the rebellion which seemed to be brewing. The Indians' response was to slip away and start north by themselves.

They harmed no one. They sought no fight. Death was near them anyway and they wanted only to be allowed to get back home, to die where they had lived, instead of in the parching desert where the white man had banished them.

But the hue and the cry was out and the hounds were on the trail.

And so began one of the epic flights of all time. Justice cannot be done to this wild struggle in a few words. But you'll read the astounding, gripping story in Joseph Chadwick's great novel for next issue, RED TRAIL OF NO RETURN, where it serves as a background for a thrilling yarn of the West.

You'll read how General Crook chased the Cheyennes for months, how Bat Masterson organized a posse to head them off, how Wyatt Earp, the great gunfighter, figured in the story and how all these men's destinies were tied up with the Rio Kid and his faithful partner, Celestino Mireles.

This is truly a great Rio Kid story. It is based on one of the great stories of all time. And from it Joe Chadwick has fashioned a novel which is a gripping, action-loaded narrative. It will hold you, it will move you close to tears, it will stir your sense of justice as you have rarely felt it stirred. Look forward to this fine novel, RED TRAIL OF

NO RETURN. It's next issue's big fiction treat for everybody!

Along with it in the same issue is a story of the famous Texas Ranger, Chick Bowdrie, the character created by Louis L'Amour. This story is called THE RANGER RIDES TO TOWN.

It tells how Chick Bowdrie rode one day into the sleepy town of Slade, to bump right into a bank holdup. Taken by surprise, the bandits were like sitting ducks for the sharp-shooting badge-toter. In a gun punctuated smoke cloud, three bandits paid with their lives, and left Bowdrie in lone possession of the field.

He'd smashed a holdup. But Bowdrie was not satisfied. His keen eyes and excellent observation spotted plenty the townsmen missed.

There was another dead man inside the bank. Bowdrie knew he hadn't killed this man. Who did? There was more to this planned crime than met the eye. So instead of marking it off as a crime solved, Bowdrie really went to work on the case and the results of that investigation were startling to say the least.

You'll like Chick Bowdrie and if you haven't run across him before, you can add another great character to your list of favorites.

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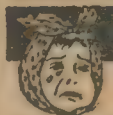

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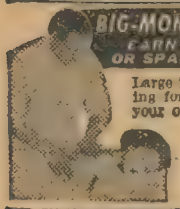

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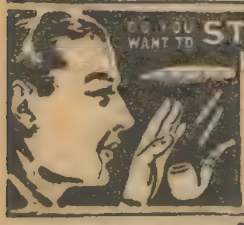

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HERE'S our friend Mitchell back with another beef, which isn't so bad, since raising beef is the great Western industry, no? But friend Mitchell is a gun expert and it sure riles him to spot any deviation from 150% accuracy in gun talk:

I would be the first person to admit that you gentlemen certainly know your revolvers. But that still doesn't keep me from asking this question. How is it that in the brief space between the cover and page 11, the Rio Kid always manages to shift from the percussion era to that of the breech-loading metallic cartridge revolver?

Sure, Pryor's adventures could take place during both of these eras—but certainly not in the same issue!—*Eugene H. Mitchell, Dallas, Texas.*

Let's ask a question, Gene. By Page 11, do you mean the opening illustration, or the text of the story? If it's the illustration on page 11, and any guns are showing, they are really too small to be able to tell exactly what they are. If it's the text, well, so far as we know, the authors have always pretty well specified that Pryor packs an army Dragoon. Of course, the Rio Kid flourished over quite a period as you point out, a period during which the cap and ball ammunition gave way to metallic cartridges.

Then there's this point. We're very careful, in planning our covers, to have the details of uniforms, belts, guns and so on, absolutely accurate. The artists do a great deal of research and try to duplicate these things precisely. So the covers should be authentic.

However, these covers are frequently symbolic and do not necessarily represent any particular illustration from the story itself. They just represent the Rio Kid in the abstract, more or less. See? But if you run across any definite violation of the gun rules, why you just haul off and point to it.

And here's a lady with fire in her eye:

So women are trying to take over a man's world, eh? So what? Perhaps your correspondent, Mr. Derwent, remembers some little girl who screamed at the sight of a mouse. Well,

let me tell you something. There are quite a few women in these United States who've taken over a man's trade because they are better qualified for the job. I myself am skilled at three different trades usually left to a "big strong man"—and I'm not ashamed of it! Furthermore I can ride, shoot and play cards to beat any average "he-man". I'm the only girl in our family yet my dad often calls me his "favorite son" in jest—and I'm proud of it.

I suppose by all this you'll be thinking I'm lantern-jawed, cross-eyed, bow-legged and just disgusted with men in general. I'll answer that one too.

I miss six feet by 1¼ inches, have brown eyes, blonde hair, weigh 168 and you can judge my appearance by the enclosed picture. I'm just fed up. Men have had the upper hand for so long that they hate to admit they can be beaten.

I enjoy the adventures of the Rio Kid very much but am going to forget to buy your magazine if I read a few more bright remarks from fellows like Mr. Derwent. He should have lived in India.—*W. D. Lutjens, Mitchell, S. Dakota.*

Hey, Derwent! You can come out of hiding now, she's gone. And if you want to talk back, these columns are still open to you. But we're durned glad Miss Lutjens sent along her picture. We've studied that snapshot and we're plumb sorry we can't print it. Never saw a prettier gal.

We figured Mr. Derwent's letter might set off some fireworks! Well, enough for that. And now here's a quote or two from another letter or three:

THE RIO KID WESTERN is our favorite Western magazine. We frequently take turns reading it aloud to each other. It certainly gives one a fine picture of the Old West.—*Mr. and Mrs. Vaille, New Orleans, La.*

The only complaint I have about the exciting adventures of Bob Pryor is that the magazine does not come out often enough. Outside of that, it's swell in every particular.—*Johnson Malvett, Chicago.*

Keep up the good work, you're doing fine—it's always the Rio Kid for mine!—*Wilbur Fralingson, Milwaukee, Wis.*

Thanks, everybody, for all those kind words. Wish we had room to print all your letters, but whether printed here or not every letter gets individual attention and we appreciate them all.

That does it for now, folks, but don't forget to write us and get in on the powwow. Just drop a card or letter, addressed to The Editor, RIO KID WESTERN, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y.

—THE EDITOR.


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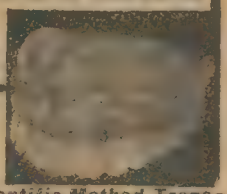

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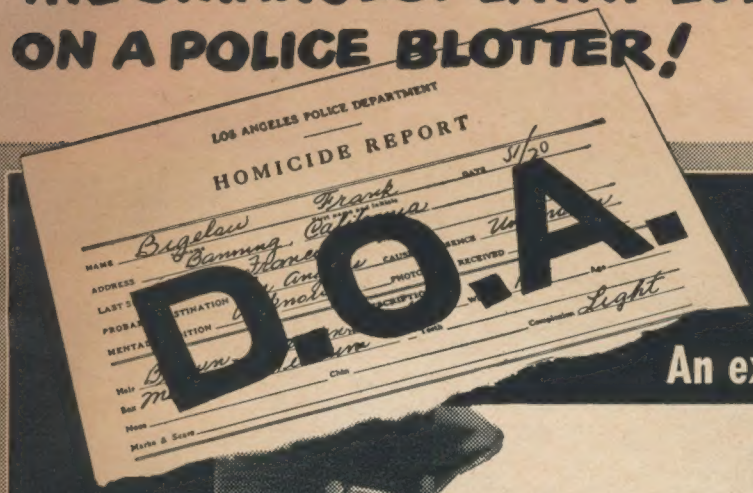


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